SHORT STORIES

EDITED BY C. ARTHUR PEARSON (OF PEARSON'S WEEKLY)

NO. 363. FOR WEEK ENDING DECEMBER 14TH, 1895. [ONE PENNY.

BE SURE TO CUT

10,000 RUGS

GIVEN AWAY.

THIS PHENOMENAL OFFER is made to the readers of SHORT STORIES only. On receipt of this advertisement, accompanied by Postal Order for 6s. or 74 stamps, we will forward DIRECT FROM OUR LOOMS to your address, one of our genuine SEAMLESS WOVEN REVERSIBLE CARPETS, suitable for Drawing-room, Dining room, Bedroom, etc., handsomely bordered, and woven in thirty different patterns and art colourings to suit all requirements, and LARGE ENOUGH TO COVER ANY ORDINARY-SIZED ROOM. These Carpets are manufactured from a material equal in wear to wool, and are undoubtedly the cheapest in the world.

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No. 363.] For the Week ending December 14th, 1895. [ONE PENNY.

The Veil of the Temple.

BERT STANHOPE tipped his chair back against the mantelpiece, and filled in the intervals of comment on the game with cigarette smoke. When the first cigarette was finished he lighted another, and continued in his absorption.

After a while one of the players put his cue in the rack, and Stanhope called out to him:

"Going, Spaulding?"

"Yes; I'm going to call on Mrs. Martin. You know her, don't you? Why, to be sure you do. She who was Esther Parkhurst, with whom you played the moth and candle act."

"Yes. I know her—or did once."

"Are you still on calling terms?"

"Who can tell?"

"You'd better find out, then. It's her first reception day this season. You'd do well to go up. She's a power in the land."

"Maybe I will, later on. What's her number?"

"24, H—— Street. Big white stone house."

Stanhope went over to the window and looked out at the trees in the square. The leaves were just falling, and the place looked desolate, with its occasional passers-by. He commented, for the benefit of the curtains, that the club might have been in some important thoroughfare as befitted the august body whose members it sometimes sheltered.

Then he fell to looking between the bars of the past, and watching the dead actions and thoughts as they moved about, some nearer, and some afar off. He wondered how he would be received if he should go to Mrs. Martin's. There was no doubt that he would make an effect, but its nature was problematical.

He had only just returned to town, and this was her first day since his return. It would look well, and might result well if he should hasten to pay his respects. She was one of those persons with whom it was well to be on excellent terms. With the young and attractive wife of a man of immense influence, the making of a young officer of ambitious tendencies lay quite within her power.

Stanhope thought of what had been, as he flicked the ashes from his cigarette; thought of what had been, smiled, took his hat, and then sauntered out of the club. It was not a long walk, only a few streets, but he went slowly, for he was still uncertain and undecided as to the proper course to pursue if Esther should make a scene, turn

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faint or flush deeply. She had been given to displaying every emotion.

The house was certainly imposing, it seemed to him. Little dark Esther must be rather out of place in anything so stately. There were a dozen or more carriages in front of it, and as he went up the steps a woman he knew came out and looked up and down for her pair.

She saw Stanhope, and welcomed him effusively; a *salon* filled with officers was the ambition of her life, and when the officers were of this one's sort—she invited him then and there to dinner. He accepted and took her to her carriage, then went into the house with restored confidence. He could see Esther, as he took off his overcoat, through the wide doorway. She was so entirely unchanged that Stanhope grew nervous again and watched her anxiously as the footman called "Captain Stanhope," and Mrs. Martin turned towards him with the delighted, meaningless smile of a London hostess.

Evidently the name meant nothing to her ear, but a gleam of recognition gave her face more charm as she held out her hand.

"Why, I am more than glad to see you, Mr.—no, it's Captain now, isn't it?—Captain Stanhope. I heard you were back, and wondered if you would come in to-day. You're not in the least changed in appearance, nor in heart either, I suppose; so you will be glad to hear that Miss Francis—Merton Francis, you know—is here. She is quite as fascinating as ever, and you are to go in and see her."

The manner was certainly correct, but Stanhope was not hopeful.

"Very well, I'll go to Miss Francis, if I may see you alone later."

She nodded her head as she turned to welcome an old but imposing couple, who were announced as General and Mrs. Starling.

The Captain's humour improved. He found Miss Francis, and she, too, was glad to see him; he felt that the lot of the returned wanderer—provided he does not wander too long—is indeed pleasant. There were a number of girls, those in their third, fourth, and indefinite seasons, a couple of matrons, and a few men, mostly very young or very old, drinking with evident delight.

These wandered away in time, and before a new being came up to claim her attention, Stanhope had led Miss Francis to believe that it was solely on her account that he had come. At least she appeared to believe it. One of her greatest charms was that she never repulsed a compliment, whether spoken or implied, and thereby did not harass him who complimented, nor appear self-conscious. Stanhope led the subject to Mrs. Martin.

"She seems about the same as ever."

"She is, but you talk as if it were eighteen years instead of eighteen months since we last saw you."

"It seems longer than it really is, a great deal longer."

"Does it? Time passes quickly here."

And then a most unwelcome feminine friend broke up the *tête-à-tête*.

"Come and see me, Captain Stanhope," called out Miss Francis.

Stanhope bowed and wandered off. He met a retired officer, who took him into one corner and made him give a history of several troops and a score of old comrades.

Stanhope disliked reminiscencing, and tried to break away, but Major Harvey was unrelenting. The callers were beginning to thin out, and Mrs. Martin had dropped into a chair. The Major's wife rescued Stanhope at last, leading her husband away.

There were only a few stragglers left. Miss Francis had gone up-stairs for her wraps and came down again, looking younger andmost be witching in her velvet and furs. She stood beside a tall, green-shaded lamp for a moment, drawing on her gloves and giving Stanhope time to admire her. She was colourless and clear-cut enough to stand the trying light. When she left Stanhope joined Esther.

"Come and sit in the window seat; you look tired."

"I am. Standing so long is very trying. Thank you. I do like cushions. Yes, I'm perfectly comfortable."

She had stopped the business-like smiling which had strained her nerves all the afternoon, and only looked up at him with her large, dreamy eyes, and gave a contented sigh.

Stanhope waited for her to speak, but she did not.

"You look worn out, poor child," he said finally; then he remembered that he had said almost the same thing a moment earlier.

"Only a little; but I lose my colour very easily."

"Yes, I know."

Another silence, which Mrs. Martin took so calmly that it was evident she was at her ease. Stanhope would rather have had her chatter in commonplaces. He began again:

"It seems so odd to see you again in this way. Mrs. Martin—you who were Esther Parkhurst eighteen months ago."

"Yes."

Stanhope kept on. "You must be very young yet; not quite twenty-one, I should think. Yes, about two months short of that;" and then he watched her narrowly. "You are young, but I wonder if you are happy?" His eyes grew very soft, but she was not looking.

"No, I think not. I never was very happy, I believe."

"Never? Since when?"

"Oh, since I was nineteen, perhaps."

Her boldness was so sudden that the man considered all barriers broke down by it. He leant nearer, and she did not move away.

"Since then I have not been happy either; wretched, in fact. Since that time I went away."

There was a slow smile on Mrs. Martin's lips, and it went away as slowly. Distinctly she meant it to be taken for incredulity.

"You don't believe me," protested Stanhope. "You never did trust me. Listen!" He gave a laugh which would have done credit to a stage villain, and which made Mrs. Martin shift away. "Listen, I am going to tell you a story, a fairy story, we'll call it, because it all seems so unreal now. We will make all our commonplace mortals grandees, our heroine shall be a princess, the hero a knight, and the scene a royal court.

"Once upon a time there lived a beautiful princess, a princess with black hair—like the raven's breast is the accepted simile, I believe—and large, brown eyes. She was very lovely and lovable—but, there, you have doubtless heard of her so often that my unaccustomed words must seem weak. Well, the princess saw one day, at her father's court, a knight who had nothing but his love and his service to give her. But it was not the custom in the land where the princess reigned supreme to proclaim the losing of one's heart. The knight abode near his beautiful lady-love for many months, and could not tear himself from her side. And the princess

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returned his love. For a time they were happy; oh, very happy, Esther. No words had been spoken, but each knew the other's heart. Tell me if my story goes wrong."

"It is right. Go on."

"May I? There came a time when the knight was forced to go away, for, being a soldier, he had to obey. So the knight went to the princess at parting. Shall I go on?"

"Yes."

"As he turned away after the leave-taking, going with a heavy heart, the princess called him back and—how shall I say it?—called him back and asked him why he had never told her of the love she knew he felt, why he was going away in silence. The soldier—that is the knight—could not explain, can never explain, being bound in honour to keep that secret, but he comforted the princess, drew her to him, and kissed her trembling lips, and then he went away, with a broken heart, leaving, as he thought, a sad heart behind him.

"But he was wrong, and alas! for the constancy of women, the princess forgot the knight, but the knight remembered. And at last when he was free he came back to claim the woman he loved, and found her beyond his reach, the wife of an old and reverend courtier; a woman who lived only for her own pleasure, forgetting the weary heart, the broken life she had left beside the deserted path of her youth and maidenhood.

"I have told you all the story, and I must go now. I've an engagement with Blair."

"No, the story is neither finished nor complete. The engagement will wait; you can break it. I am going to finish the story—and add to it. I shall not call the heroine a princess, for she was not; only a young girl desperately in love. Besides, the princesses in fairy tales are always as good as they are beautiful. I—that is, the girl—was not that. This is my version.

"Once upon a time there lived a girl who had been brought up with high ideals, to believe every knight ready to fight, to live, and to die in the cause of distressed beauty. She had just come from a convent life, just made her first steps in the big, hard world, though then she thought it a loving, kind world. Well, as you said, the girl and the knight met, and although at first she gave him little notice, in time she came to love him as few girls love nowadays, with a love mediæval and heroic in its intensity. She would gladly have died for him, or lived for him, which, she has learned now, is far harder.

"She was one of those who are so trusting—or so foolish—that they would give up the world for love, thinking at the time it an honour well lost. Perhaps the fact that she had in her veins the blood of Southern Italy had something to do with a devotion so un-English. Had the knight said: 'Come with me,' she would have followed him and left everything. But, as you know, he said nothing. He needed no words, for he was a good actor. You need not look grieved; he was an actor. He lured the girl on—but not too far. He was an 'officer and a gentleman,' and he dared not risk his commission by any rashness.

"The girl did not understand this then; she believed the fictions he had made up to deceive her, so she was absurdly happy for a year—desperately happy, as it seems in the light of past events. Then there came a time when the knight went away, two thousand long miles away. Oh! I know he was ordered away; I understand that. It might as well have been to another world. A hundred miles was more than she had ever travelled in her short life.

"Well, the soldier came to her one day when she was alone to take his leave. He expected regret at the parting, but those soft, dark eyes of his looked a skilfully-feigned anguish. The girl waited for him to tell her now that he loved her. But he turned to go, his hand was on the curtain of the door, when the girl called him back.

"It is not a pleasant story to tell, yet I shall take it as my punishment. The knight looked at the girl, saw a face burning with shame and excitement, saw two eyes following all his motions, as if her soul depended upon him. He stood there a little undecided. The girl saw his indecision, and misinterpreted his silence, so she spoke herself. She said that if he went away without her she should kill herself.

"She grovelled at his feet, if not literally, figuratively. She threw herself into his arms—and he held her there. She knew the last happy moments, the last unembittered moments of her pitifully short life as he kissed her hot lips and lied plausibly to her; told her some tale of pledged honour, and secrets that could not be divulged; said that he loved her and only her. Then he put her from him, and went away.

"For a while the girl stood there alone, dazed. Then she realised what she had done. She had rendered in twain the Veil of the Temple, and had shown the Holy of Holies of a woman's heart to sacrilegious eyes. When a woman does that, either the force that rends the veil is something fearful, or there is nothing worth keeping hidden; either her love is overmastering, or there is no love. What that girl suffered in the next hour no man and few women can understand. But from the flame she came forth anew. The love was not burned away, but it had showed her another road, a road where she would find forgetfulness.

"She went into the gay world, the world where they say *on s'amuse*, and if she had not been goaded on by a maddening memory, she would have fallen from sheer weariness. She looked about and saw little that was good, where all before had seemed so pure and bright. In time she was forced—not very unwillingly—into a marriage for position that neither displeased nor pleased her. She grew calmly fond of the old man, her husband, who adored her; but she never told him the story of that year, the shame of which has made her whole life restless.

"When, in after days, the knight came riding back, and believed that he would find the influential wife of an influential man useful—ah, but it is true, and you know it—when he came back he tried to revive her love by a mean pretence. But the girl had become a woman of the world—a woman of no illusions. Once again the Veil of the Temple was rent in twain, this time not to disclose an Ark of burning glory, but an empty Holy of Holies.

"That is all. You may keep your engagement now. I have told you the true story."

N. N.

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GOLDEN ✱ STAR.

- - A Romance - -

BY GEORGE GRIFFITH.

Author of "The Angel of the Revolution," "Valdar the Oft-Born," "The Outlaws of the Air," etc., etc.

CHAPTER XXVII.

The First Victory.

Although Hartness was a much taller and broader man than the Spaniard, his long, loose overcoat fitted him well enough for the occasion, and when he had put on his shako, and wrapped his scarf about his neck so as to hide his fair beard, he was disguised enough to pass in the darkness for one of the enemy. We now took the two soldiers who had been with the officer and visited all the posts. We found four of the sentries who could not return the password and were therefore enemies. These we disarmed and bound instead of killing them, for I could see that what I had done had pleased my friend but little, though he saw that in such a desperate venture as ours it was necessary to use desperate measures.

He was disguised enough to pass in the darkness.

When we had gone the rounds and made sure of all, we buried the two dead bodies, and took our prisoners into one of the caves under the carved stones. Then I posted my men so as to guard all the approaches from the city to the Rodadero, and after that I went with Hartness to the hidden hole by the Sayacusca, and showed him how the way to the Hall of Gold was opened. I did this so that the secret might be in good and safe hands if I should fall in battle, and so that he should be able to properly protect the welfare of Ruth and Golden Star, and fulfil my promises to himself and the Professor.

When I had turned the stone and showed him the chain, I pulled it up and supported it as I had done before, only this time I used the carbine which had belonged to the sentry I had killed, and to the stock of this I fastened a long rope which Tupac had hidden there by my orders. This rope I stretched out along the ground, hiding it as well as I could, in a straight line away from the Sayacusca. The end I led into the entrance of one of the many passages or tunnels which run under the carved stones. By the time I had done this the water had all flowed away, and Hartness said to me:

"Are you going to leave the entrance to your treasure-house open like that for His Excellency to walk into to-morrow?"

"Yes," I said, "but it is only half open. Unless the door below is open too there is no way out or in save this and the channel through which the waters flow, so that His Excellency will not find much down there."

"I see—a trap," he said, "and not one that I should care to see a friend of mine walk into. But you don't mean to drown them all like rats in a hole, do you?"

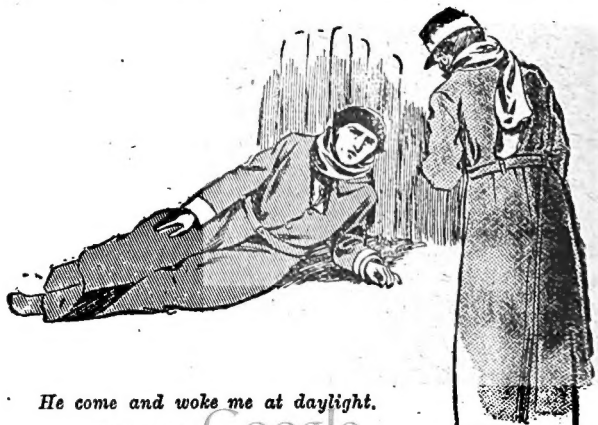
"I cannot tell that yet," I said. "If we can take them alive we may do so, but unless they yield to us they shall yield to the water. Now everything is ready, and we have but to wait. Come and sleep for a little and I will keep watch, and then I will sleep and you shall watch. It will not be daylight for six hours yet, and we can do nothing more till then."

We went to the cavern in which I had hidden the end of the rope, and he lay down on the soft, clean sand, and, soldier-like, was fast asleep almost as soon as he had lain down. I left him there, and made the round of the guards and spoke with the men, telling them as much as it was necessary for them to know of my plans for the next day, and allowed half of them to take two or three hours' rest with their weapons ready at hand while the others watched, and then I went back to Hartness and told him to wake me in three hours, and soon was fast asleep in his place. He came and woke me at daylight and told me that everything was still quiet and that the sentries were all in their places.

Then, when we had breakfasted on the food we had brought with us from the fortress, we called in all the sentries save the two by the Gate of Sand and hid them among the stones and bushes all within an easy rifle-shot of the entrance to the water-cavern. I bade the two I had left by the gate tell the Governor that all was well and, when he had ridden by, to mix with the soldiers and tell them who were for me to separate from the others as soon as they heard my signal cry, and then to wait for the English Captain.

For nearly an hour we sat and watched for the coming of the enemy, and then at last we saw a troop of horse come up out of the valley round the end of the fortress. After them came a group of officers on horseback with the Governor riding at their head, and then another troop of horse, in all about three hundred men. The first troop, led by the Governor and his officers, came on towards the Sayacusca, and the others halted and spread themselves out along the ridge that runs round it. When they saw the empty hole and the steps leading down into the darkness they all crowded round, peering down into it. Then two lanterns were lighted and some of them went down.

They had all dismounted from their horses and were indulging their curiosity without suspicion. I waited till they were nearly all in my trap and then came the moment to close it. My long wailing cry rang out loud and shrill through the hollow and was taken up by my men in hiding, and in an instant all was confusion. I heard my name shouted from one to the other and saw more than half of the troopers in the hollow leave their ranks and gallop away towards the plain. Then I took aim at a trooper who was watching the officers' horses and fired. The bullet struck his horse and it reared up and threw him, and then fell and



He come and woke me at daylight.

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lay kicking on the ground. At this all the others took fright and broke loose and galloped away in all directions. At the same instant the rifles of my men began cracking all round, and saddle after saddle was emptied as the bullets found their mark.

"I'm going to catch one of those horses," said Hartness suddenly to me, "then I'll ride out and bring those other fellows up and show them what to do. That'll be more in my line than this sort of work. Good-bye; you will see or hear of me again before long."

The next moment he was gone, and I had not fired many more shots before I saw him mounted on one of the officers' horses galloping through the hollow towards the ridge. All this time none of my men had shown themselves, and the constant stream of shots coming from all sides of them had thrown the Governor's troops into utter confusion. The officers were shouting orders which no one listened to, the horses were galloping wildly about, rearing and plunging with the pain of their wounds, and many of the soldiers had already taken to flight, believing in their panic that the hollow was full of hidden enemies.

The bullet struck his horse.

We kept up the fire from our hiding-places until we heard shouts and cheers coming from the ridge, and I looked and saw Hartness with a drawn sword in his hand, leading a body of some hundred and fifty troopers down into the hollow.

Now I saw that we should be able to end the battle quickly, so I sent up my signal cry again and called for my own men to come out. Then I pulled the rope and released the chain, and ran out towards my men, shouting to them to close round the entrance to the water-cavern and shoot all who tried to get out. Some three or four sought to escape, and were shot, and then the rest, seeing my men running at them with the bayonet, and the other troopers coming up led by a stranger, lost heart and crowded back into the cleft, firing their revolvers wildly as they went.

The next moment we heard cries of terror coming up out of the darkness, mingled with the rushing of the water, and the Governor, followed by about six of his officers, came leaping up the steps to find a line of bayonets drawn up across the mouth. With the waters surging up behind them and the bayonets in front of them, there was nothing for them but surrender or death.

Hartness, who had now dismounted, ordered the men to fall back a pace, and, as they did so he went through the line with his sword in one hand and a revolver in the other and said to the Governor:

"Señor, will you yield or go back down yonder?"

"We must yield," said the Governor, "since there is no choice. But who are you, and what are you, an Englishman, doing here in arms against the Government?"

"Who I am matters nothing just now," he replied, "and as for your Government it no longer exists. That must be enough for you. Now, señores, give up your swords and revolvers quietly and no harm shall come to you. You, Señor Prada, give your sword to this caballero here who is the Inca Vilcaroya and lawful ruler of this country."

The Governor turned and stared at me, dumb with amazement at these strange words, and all the others stared too, for, like him, they had no doubt heard the legend of my strange fate. He drew his sword and as he did so I covered him with my revolver, and extended my hand to take it. He held the hilt out to me with a trembling hand. I took it in silence, and then I turned from him and said to my men:

"Bring these Spaniards out and bind them safely, then follow me to the Seat of the Incas."

When they saw that the victory was with us, and that the Governor himself was our prisoner, together with many of the chief of his officers, those of the soldiers who had not been for me when they came were glad enough now to secure themselves by shouting my name and obeying my orders, and when I moved away towards the Seat, they followed me, laughing and cheering, well pleased to see their hated masters prisoners in their midst.

The great carved rock which is called the Inca's Seat is, as I have already said, a great rounded mass of rock rising up from the plain of the Rodadero, and carved into many seats. On the top there are three broad seats, the middle one higher than all the rest, and it was here that my forefathers had sat to watch the building of the great fortress, and sometimes to give audience to their people.

Now I sat on it, and the soldiers drew themselves up round the rock, with the prisoners in the midst of them, and I spoke to them, and told them freely of the strange things that had happened to me, and how I had come back to the Land of the Four Regions to drive out their oppressors and restore the just and gentle rule of my ancestors. Then I had the Governor brought up and stood before me and bade Francis Hartness come and sit on my right hand and speak to him for me, and by his lips I told him that unless the city was surrendered to me before evening he and all his officers should die and all the houses of the Spaniards in the city should be given to the flames and no pity shown to any man, woman, or child of them, for as they had treated my people so I had sworn to treat them unless they yielded.

You may think how troubled he was at hearing such words as these, since he knew from what he had seen that there was conspiracy and treachery among his own men, and he had no knowledge of how far this had gone or which of his men he could trust, and so this man, who but a few hours before had been master of the whole valley and had looked upon the Indios, as he called them, as little better than slaves, now answered me humbly enough and prayed me not to murder him when he was helpless in my power. And to this I answered him that the blood of my people had been crying out for many generations against his people, and that this was the day not of mercy but of vengeance, and that I would do as I had said unless the city were delivered to me.

Then I descended from the seat and mounted the Governor's horse, and, after I had sent a company of twelve men to ride quickly down to the city and then to ride through all the streets, shouting my name as a signal to tell the Indians that all was well, and that the moment for them to rise against their oppressors had come, I took my place beside Hartness at the head of our little army, and with our prisoners well guarded close behind us we set out on our way back to Cuzco.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

The Fight for the City.

As we approached the city we heard the sound of the church bells being rung wildly, and looking down, we could see the streets and squares full of people, and as we got nearer still we heard the cracking of rifles and the shouts and cries of men in conflict.

"There is either a fight or a riot going on down there," said Hartness to me, "and if many of the soldiers remain faithful to the Government there'll be some bloodshed before to-night. Have you any idea how many there are?"

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"There were more than two thousand soldiers in the city yesterday," I said, "and out of these more than half have already taken my gold and sworn faith to me. Of the rest many are wavering, and when they see that we have taken the Governor prisoner I think they will come over."

"Very likely," he said, "but how about those machine guns in the barracks? There are three Gatlings and two Maxims, and if they keep those and work them properly they'll just sweep the streets and squares clear, you know."

"I have promised fifty pounds weight of gold for each of them," I said; "and, more than that, there should be no ammunition for them by this time if what the sentries told us is true."

"Yes," he said, "if we can get hold of that or even the best part of it I don't think there will be much danger. However, as everything depends on that I think we had better go straight to the Cuartel first. If we have that we have Cuzco."

We entered the city by the street of El Triunfo and made our way straight to the great Plaza. As we rode along three abreast we were greeted by joyful cries from the crowds of Indians who parted to leave a way for us through the midst of them. Tupac and his comrades had done their work well, and all night the people had been thronging into the city from the surrounding country. All the shops and the houses of the Spaniards were already shut up, for although none knew the truth of what was happening, all thought that the revolution had already broken out in Cuzco and so had made themselves as safe as they could.

A little way from the entrance to the great square we came upon Tupac at the head of some two hundred of the men of San Sebastian, armed with knives and guns and pistols of all sorts which they had taken during the night from the towns and villages around where they had been doing the work I had bidden them do. He told me that there were more than a thousand soldiers in the city waiting only for me to show myself to kill their officers and come over to us, and that the others would fight without heart, if they fought at all, now that the Governor was taken—for half of the people of Cuzco were for the Government and half for the revolution, and so the city would be divided against itself and all would be confusion as soon as the fighting began.

He also told me that the official who is called the Sub-Prefect had brought out two of the machine guns and had planted them at each end of the terrace in front of the cathedral and made a proclamation that unless everyone left the streets within an hour he would have them cleared with bullets.

When I told this to Hartness he said:

"Then we must have those two guns first. Tell Tupac to break his men up into little bands of about half-a-dozen each and send them round into all the streets leading to the square and tell everyone that isn't armed to keep out of the way if they don't want to get hurt. Then you ride on with the prisoners and a guard of fifty men, and let them be ready to shoot sharply. Tell them to aim at the knees and not to empty their magazines too fast. I'll look after the guns. They won't fire on you for fear of killing the Governor and the rest. Now, forward!"

I did as he said. Tupac's men broke up and disappeared as though by magic. I took the reins of the horse on which the Governor was bound and bade half-a-dozen of my men to do the same with the others. Then two and two we trotted into the square, Tupac running along by my horse's head. It was covered with groups of people all talking and looking and pointing about them, and on the terrace before the cathedral there were two companies of soldiers, one at each end, drawn up behind a machine gun. As soon as the people saw me ride in with the Governor bound beside me a great shout went up and many came running towards me, but I waved them back and shouted to them to leave the square and guard all the streets leading into it. I did this so that those who understood me and were therefore friends, might escape out of harm's way before the guns began to fire.

Then I drew my revolver and put it to the Governor's head and bade Tupac tell him to order the men away from the guns, and that if a shot was fired he should be the first to die.

He came upon Tupac.

So, as there was no help for it, he did so, and called to the officers to come down and speak with him, but instead of obeying they shouted some orders to their men and I saw them making ready to fire the guns, for, as we found out afterwards, they were men who would have joined the revolution when it broke out.

But before the guns could be trained on us Hartness's troop swung round into the square. The twenty foot soldiers sent a volley along the terrace, firing low as he had told them, and killing and wounding nearly half of the men at the guns. Then there came a rattling volley from the cavalry and another from my own men, and then, with a great shout and a clattering of hoofs, Hartness leapt his horse up the steps at the end of the terrace, where the street slopes up nearly level with it at the back by the cathedral, and charged down on the rear of the enemy just as the gun was swung round.

As he did this I led my men round to the other end of the terrace, where I saw that the men had begun fighting among themselves, and thus I knew that some of them were our friends and were seeking to prevent the others from training the gun on us. I halted, and ordered thirty of my men to dismount and take the gun, which they did with very little trouble, for the others, seeing how hopelessly they were outnumbered, either threw down their arms and ran away, or surrendered. Two of the officers were killed and another one taken prisoner.

Meanwhile Hartness had cleared the other end of the terrace, and taken the other gun after killing nearly every man who had defended it. But scarcely had this been done than we heard the rattle of drums and the sound of bugles, and saw two columns of men marching at the double into the Plaza, one from the street leading from the Plaza Del Cabillo, where the barracks are, and the other past the Church of the Jesuits, which was at the other end of the square.

"Are those friends or enemies, or both?" Hartness asked me, when he had ordered the two guns to be trained one on each of the columns, and sat down behind one of them himself.

"If there are friends among them," I said, "they know what to do, and when they have done it you can fire."

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Even as I spoke the two columns seemed to break up. Scores of men broke out of the ranks, shouting my name and cheering, and these all ran together towards the fountain in the middle of the square. The rest stopped in wonder and confusion, their officers shouting furiously at them, and ordering them to fire on the deserters. Some obeyed, others, when they saw the guns trained on them, ran away and hid themselves in doorways, and then Hartness gave the order to fire.

Instantly every other sound was drowned by the terrible voices of the machine guns. Hartness glanced once along the barrel of his, and then sent a torrent of bullets full into the middle of the broken column that had come down from the Plaza Del Cabillo. Then he moved it a little from side to side, and then stopped. When the smoke had drifted away I saw that there was not a living being in the corner of the square, only huddled heaps of corpses and bodies of animals. Then he turned the gun on the other corner into which the other gun was firing, and soon not a man or an animal was left alive there also.

When the firing ceased there were none left in the square but those who had declared for us. Hartness immediately formed these into two columns. He led one of them with one gun at the head into the street past the Church of the Jesuits, and I led the other with the second gun into the other street leading to the Cuartel, and up these two treets we fought our way into the Plaza Del Cabillo in which we could hear more fighting already going on.

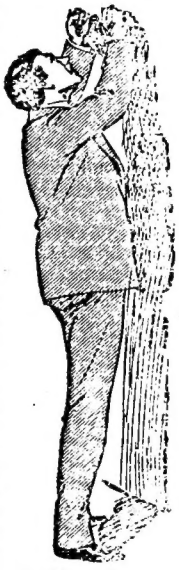
When we at last gained the square we found a furious fight going on in front of the Cuartel between one body of men who were defending the building and another that was attacking it, but which of these were friends or foes we did not know until Tupac, heedless of the flying bullets, ran out shouting in Quichua that Vilcaroya had come. Shouts and cheers from the Cuartel soon told us that our friends had got possession of it, and when the fight was over I learnt that when the two columns had started, leaving a third drawn up in the square before the Cuartel, those who were for us, remembering what I had said about the gold that I would give for the machine guns and the ammunition, had broken their ranks and made a rush for the doors to secure the three guns which were in the courtyard, and so the fight had begun, they seeking to hold the Cuartel against the others until help came.

As soon as I knew which were our enemies, and their bullets came singing about our ears, I had the gun trained on them, and gave the word to fire. But no sooner had it begun to rain its tempest of death than we heard the other one speak from the other end of the square, and such a storm of bullets swept across the Plaza that before many moments had passed there was not a man or beast left alive in it.

I had the Governor brought before me.

Then, when the firing ceased again, those who had held the Cuartel and had taken shelter in it as soon as the machine guns began to play, threw open the doors to us and came out to welcome us, and Francis Hartness and I clasped hands as victors, and, for the time being at least, masters of the ancient City of the Sun, for with the Cuartel we had taken all the arms and ammunition stored up in Cuzco, including the three Gatling guns and the two Maxims, and, more than this, the whole of the native population of the valley was in our favour.

The fighting was now over save for conflicts that were going on in different parts of the city between the Spaniards and the Indians, and I at once had the Governor brought before me in the Cuartel and told him through Hartness to write a proclamation surrendering the city to us and ordering all the officials to come in and make their submission before sundown, threatening fire and sack to every Spanish house if it was not done. This he did, knowing well what would befal him if he refused. At the same time Hartness made a proclamation in my name in English and Spanish promising perfect freedom and security to all foreign merchants in the region that was under our command.



Beating his hands on the golden wall of his prison.

It was then about midday, and when I had given Francis Hartness full authority to act in my name as Governor of the city, which, speaking fluent Spanish, he could do better than I, I took a guard of fifty men and went with Tupac back to the Rodadero, and took ten of the men into the Hall of Gold and bade them carry out as much as they could, so that I might keep my promise to the soldiers who had been faithful to me, and while they were doing this I went with Tupac to Djama's cell and found him wailing and crying like a little child, and beating his hands on the golden wall of his prison and praying most piteously for a sight of the daylight and a breath of the fresh air of heaven.

The Spaniard when he heard us coming began to shriek and scream, and I bade Tupac tell him that I would gag him for a day and a night if he did not cease his cries. But to Djama I told what had happened, and how Cuzco was already mine, and promised that I would let him out for a little the next day if he would keep silence for half an hour, and, hearing this, he ceased his cries, and I went on to the throne-room to take the news of our victory to Ruth and Golden Star.

(To be concluded.)

IN the next number but one of SHORT STORIES, which will be on sale in Christmas week, there will appear the first instalment of a delightful serial by E. C. WAGGENER, entitled

"The Wrong that was Done."

This story, and in fact the whole number, will be profusely illustrated. We have commissioned several well-known authors to write specially seasonable stories for this issue, and if there be any of your friends who are not already regular subscribers to SHORT STORIES, this will be a splendid opportunity for them to mend their ways.

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A PROMISE UNDER PRESSURE.

The Comtesse de Moncley—who will soon change her name, as you shall see—is one of the most delicious widows imaginable, and also one of the cleverest I have ever met. From the very first day she knew precisely how to avoid any exaggeration that could be considered bad taste in the expression of her sorrow, without falling into the other extreme, and making those who saw her in her widow's weeds think she must wear red satin under her crape.

Early in April she had quietly left her Paris apartment, where no male visitors had set foot since her husband's death, and it was only by accident that, a week later, I discovered the address she had so carefully concealed from everyone. It was "Sycamore Villa, Chantilly." On the first of May there might have been seen to arrive at a little bit of a house, situated at a convenient distance from Sycamore Villa, several trunks, an English cart and pony, a saddle-horse, a bull-terrier, two servants, and a man bordering on thirty. That man was myself.

I hasten to add that in this circumstance I acted solely at my own risk and peril, without any authorisation, any right whatever, and with no other notice than my love—my profound love—to prompt me to hope that my change of domicile would not be a dead loss. Ah, well—nothing venture, nothing win. And what did I venture? The Salon, the May *fêtes*, the Grand Prix, the mob in the Allée des Poteaux, a few balls—what were they in comparison with the charms of a most attractive neighbourhood? I have known men to cross the seas and spend fortunes to follow to the ends of the world an adventuress, whose whole body was not worth the tip of Mme. de Moncley's little finger.

Clarisse's pretty anger when I presented myself at her house on the day of arrival was my first delightful recompense. In spite of her grand air I saw that she was touched, and I doubt if ever lover experienced so much pleasure in being shown the door by a pretty woman. She took her time about it, too, and only pushed me into the street after a regulation lecture, to which I listened very humbly, replying only so much as was necessary to lengthen it, which concluded in these words:

"And now you will do me the favour to return to Paris. The train leaves in an hour."

"An hour!" I objected timidly. "That is hardly time to ship two horses and a carriage, and throw up a lease——"

"What is this?" she cried. "A lease! You have presumed to—go, sir! What audacity! A lease! And, if you please, where is your house?"

"A long way from here," I hastened to reply. "At the other end of the forest. I am sure it must have taken me fully three-quarters of an hour to come here."

To be precise it had taken me about five minutes.

"To think," she exclaimed, "what a poor woman deprived of her protector is exposed to! You would not have dared to do this if my husband were still alive! And to think that he considered you his best friend! Poor Charles!"

"He has never had any cause to complain," I murmured. "Let us talk together of him."

"Never!"

"Then let us talk of ourselves; that will be better still."

This suggestion shocked her so that it took me a long time to calm her. Finally, she did not wish to let me go until I had sworn never to set foot in her house again. It is needless to say that it took half an hour to persuade me to make this promise, which I broke the next morning and as often as possible.

I pass over the months that followed, merely declaring that in this vale of tears there is no more happy lot than that of such an unhappy lover as I was. Clarisse had the most adorable way of annihilating me with a look from her blue eyes—eyes that were intended for quite another purpose than annihilating—whenever she saw that I was going to fall on my knees before her, and I must confess she saw it at least ten times during every visit I made her; still, in despite of her express prohibition, and when I so far forgot myself as to tell her that, if the intent were as good as the deed, the late lamented ought to have a heavy grudge against "his best friend," seeing that I loved his wife madly from the very first.

"Not another word," she would say severely; "you blaspheme against friendship. Poor Charles!"

And her white, dimpled hand would pitilessly stop my mouth, so that, if I had followed my inclination, I would have blasphemed from morning till night like the worst traitor to friendship in the world.

The day she left off crape I profited by the occasion—naturally enough, it seems to me—to propose myself in set terms as a candidate to succeed poor Charles. That evening—it was a June evening, and the acacias made the most of the power which certain vegetables possess of intoxicating one with their perfume—that evening her hand did not stop my mouth at all, it reached for the bell. Clarisse did not threaten this time; she acted. I saw that I was on the point of being put out by her servants—who consisted of an old woman who had been her nurse and whom I could have bowled over with a breath. However, it was no time for airy persiflage. Without waiting for Nancy to seize me by the coat, I took my hat and fled.

When day broke I had not closed my eyes; not that the situation seemed desperate, for I had learned to read Clarisse's eyes. But all night long I had repeated over and over again to myself:

"Heaven grant that the little house in the Avenue Friedland is still for sale. We could be so comfortable there."

In spite of this I was no further advanced when September came, the last month of my lease. I was no longer shown the door when I suggested my candidature, but Clarisse assumed a bored air and calmly talked of something else. Between ourselves, I would rather she rang the bell, for I divined that she was thinking:

"My dear friend, you do not displease me; quite the contrary. But you must confess that, in the solitude of Chantilly, I have scarcely had opportunity of enjoying my widowhood. Let me see if it is really worthy of its reputation. In a year or two we can talk of your affairs."

In a year or two! Pretty and charming as she was, Clarisse would have a score of admirers round her, and adorers round the woman one wants to marry are like

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flies in milk; they may do no great harm, but they certainly do not improve the milk.

Early in September, Mme. de Moncley informed me one day that she was going to Paris on the morrow to have a look at her apartments.

"I sincerely hope," she added, in a severe tone, "that you do not think of accompanying me."

"How can you suggest such a thing?" said I, with apparent submission. "You leave at——"

"At eight in the evening, as I do not wish to be seen. I shall send Nancy in the afternoon to prepare my room. Ah, poor Paris!"

She no longer said "Poor Charles." I admit that this "Poor Paris!" made me much more uneasy.

The following evening, at eight o'clock, the doors of the express train, which stops hardly a minute, were already closed. Clarisse had not appeared. She reached the station just as the bell rang.

"Quick! Hurry up, madam," cried the railway official.

"Hurry," I repeated, opening a compartment at random and helping her in.

But instead of getting in, she fell back, almost fainting in my arms. This is what she had seen, and what I, too, had seen over her shoulder:

The seats of the compartment were unoccupied, and three men, perched like monkeys on the back of the seats, held to their shoulders three guns, whereof the barrels shone in the lamp-light like cannons. One of them, as we opened the door, had shouted in a terrible voice: "Don't come in for——"

I had closed the door so quickly that we had not heard the end of the sentence. Then Clarisse and I bundled ourselves into the next compartment without quite knowing what we were doing. The train was already on its way. We were alone. Mme. de Moncley seemed half dead with fear, and I must confess I was violently shaken.

"Did you see them?" she cried. "What can be happening in that compartment? They are going to fight—to kill each other! What terrible tragedy is to be enacted right beside us?"

"I don't understand it at all," I replied. "Only one explanation seems possible to me. They are hunters who have suddenly gone crazy. Otherwise why should they climb upon the seats? If they simply wanted to kill each other, they could do it without all that performance."

"No," suggested Clarisse. "It is some dreadful foreign kind of duel. In such cases they do sometimes climb up anything they can find. But why didn't they stop them at Chantilly?"

"The train itself scarcely stopped there."

"Did you hear how they called out: 'Don't come in'? The wretches, they don't want to be disturbed while they are killing themselves. Goodness! Just listen!"

The fusillade had commenced in earnest. Several gun-shots had sounded, dominated by a shrill, piercing cry, which still rings in my ears. Then a deathly silence ensued; they were all dead, however bad shots they might have been.

Though we were travelling at a rate of over forty miles an hour at the time, I made ready to get out upon the step and find out what was going on in our neighbours' compartment. As I lowered the window two arms seized me, and a voice, broken with anguish—but which sounded very sweet all the same—gasped behind me:

"Philip, if you love me, do not go! They will kill you!"

It was precisely like the fourth act of *The Huguenots* except that my name is not Raoul.

I saw the advantage of my situation, and I resolved to profit by it. I profited by it so well that, after a dialogue too intimate to be repeated here, I was in a position to sing—if I had had a voice, which I haven't—"Thou-ou ha-st said it."

For she had said it. Poor Charles was distanced now. She had said the sweet words: "I love you."

A prey to emotions bordering on the hysterical, Clarisse sobbed and clung to me with all her strength, though I had not the faintest desire to intrude on the massacre next door. They could kill themselves at their ease. Let every man attend to his own affairs. As for me, I was very much occupied just then.

That is why, early the next morning, I hurried to my lawyer to speak to him about the little house in the Avenue Friedland, which was still for sale, but, thank Fortune, is no longer in the market. Decorators and furnishers are at work in it, and when January comes you will see it occupied by a certain young couple that I know of.

But let us not anticipate. When the train pulled up at the station, my companion and I had quite forgotten our neighbours—or what was left of them; but now the authorities must be informed and the bodies removed. I had jumped out and was going to look about for a *sergeant de ville*, when I beheld the door of the compartment open and the three hunters calmly descend from it, carrying, rolled up in a rug, an inert mass which looked as if it might be the body of a young child. Without an instant's hesitation, I seized one of the assassins by the collar.

"Scoundrel!" I cried. "What have you got in that rug?"

"Don't make such a row," he replied, "or we'll have a hundred people round us. It is only my poor dog."

"Dog!" I repeated, indignant at the man's coolness. "Come, come, you cannot deceive me, I saw it all."

My captive, whom I still held by the collar, opened a corner of the rug and showed me a setter's muzzle, with flecks of foam on it dappled with blood. I dropped my hold on the man's collar in the greatest confusion.

"Really, I scarcely know how to apologise," I said. "But, frankly, it is not astonishing that I should have been deceived—three men crouching on the seats of the carriage and shooting——"

"Still, the explanation is very simple. My dog was bitten three weeks ago. I had the wound cauterised, and thought the animal was saved. We have been hunting all day near Creil, but no sooner were we in the train than hydrophobia developed and the dog began to snap at us. To attempt to put the beast out was to court death, and there was nothing for it but for us to climb up on the seats and shoot the dog. We were not able to do so until after we had left Chantilly, for the poor brute had taken refuge under the seat. Finally, by calling it, I persuaded it to put its head out, and then we shot it. I tell you, it's a trip I shall not soon forget."

"Neither shall I," I replied, and I rejoined Clarisse, who was waiting for me at a little distance, and whose curiosity was vastly excited at seeing me thus politely take leave of the assassins.

"Well, then," she said, making a little face when I had told her the story, "that doesn't count. I take back what I said."

But at the same time she softly squeezed my arm with her own, and I saw in her eyes that "that" did "count."

LE VIER.

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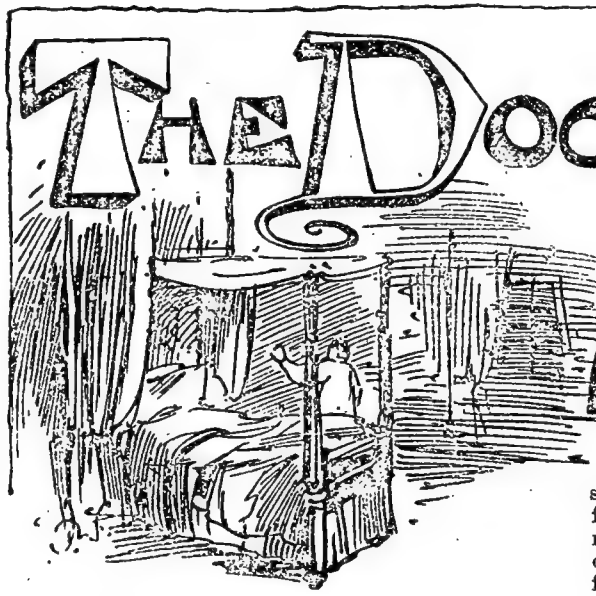
The Doctor's Story



This is the story the doctor told me as we sat smoking in the garden after dinner, one soft, warm, evening in summer: "When I left college, I was sent to Paris to finish my medical education. It was during my wild oat period, I am sorry to have to confess, when one night I paid my first visit to a gambling house—and the last, for the experience I had taught me a much-needed lesson, and satisfied my curiosity for ever in that line.

"The house into which I was introduced by a supposed friend was gorgeously arrayed, and a great game of *rouge-et-noir* was going on—a game of which I knew absolutely nothing. But with a young man's conceit, increased by the wine that flowed freely, I found a place at the table, and, instructed by my companion, commenced betting. With a greenhorn's luck I kept winning and doubling the stakes, in spite of my guide's advice to retire with what I had before my good fortune changed.

"Soon the other players withdrew from the game, leaving me alone against the bank. The play had become intensely exciting, and I was the centre of all eyes. I had offended my companion by refusing his advice to stop, so he no longer would speak to me on friendly terms, for which I neither cared nor thought. A great pile of gold lay before me on the table, staked against the bank's for the next deciding throw. If I won, the bank was broken. With my fool's luck I did win.

"The game was over, and my pockets bulged with their load of yellow French coins, swept into them without counting. Then more wine from the polite and smiling keeper and my head swam, and things danced confusedly round me. I remember someone offering to help me and saying I shouldn't risk being murdered and robbed by going home, and telling me that I should have a bed in that house, where I could sleep off my wine and excitement and be perfectly safe until daylight.

"I remember shaking his hand and vowing eternal friendship, and going with him to a room upstairs and getting into bed and hearing him softly close the door and leave me. I must have fallen asleep immediately and slumbered not long. When I woke, though my head felt weak it was clear, and in a few minutes I came to myself a bit and lay there, trying to decide if it was a dream or a reality. The room was handsomely furnished and lighted by a gas-jet turned low. A picture hung on the wall at the foot of the bed which, I began to notice, had four high posts reaching to the ceiling, and holding a canopy extending over the whole with short curtains at the sides.

"The picture, which I was watching listlessly, was the figure of an old soldier standing grimly, straight and stern, gazing at me. After a time I got tired of the old fellow and shut my eyes. When I opened them again after some minutes, my grim sentinel's hat had disappeared. That seemed strange, and I closed my eyes again, and the old chap's head was gone.

"I lay puzzling over the affair and wondering if my head was to be depended on yet, until, to make sure, I stepped from the bed to the floor. The first thing that struck me was that the canopy top of my bed looked queer. It seemed lower, and the four posts holding it seemed to have pierced through its corners and into the ceiling above. While I was trying to understand I saw between the canopy and the ceiling a glistening iron rod, apparently grooved like an immense screw, and twisting so noiselessly and slowly that its motion was almost imperceptible.

"At once it flashed on me that I was in peril of some kind, and though very startled I managed to avoid making a noise, while I tried to comprehend what devilry was going on.

"Soon I saw through it all. The canopy was bogus—merely hiding a soft mattress or something, which was being forced gradually down by the screw worked from the room above, and was intended to catch and smother whoever was in the bed, after winning the gamblers' gold and being drugged with their wine like myself. Judging from the movements the screw was making, I calculated a half-hour must intervene ere my murderers would pay me a visit—providing I didn't precipitate an attack sooner by alarming them.

"Without a sound I got a window open and gazed out in the darkness. The wind was blowing and rattling the shutters, and might prevent the noise of an escape being heard in case one was possible. Thick clouds were flying over the sky, obscuring the moon just rising. I could see that my room was in the back of the house, just below the attic, and that I looked out on a yard

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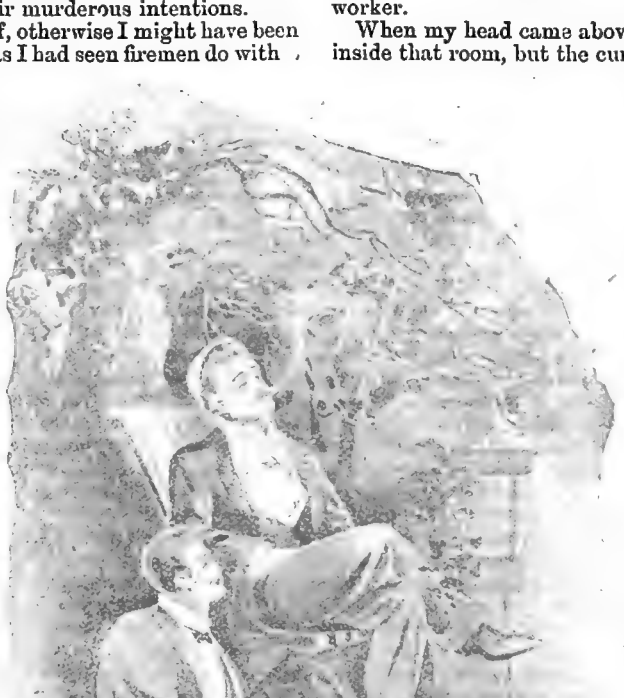
bounded by a wall too high to scale, and no doubt made so purposely.

"Beneath me on the first floor a window shot forth bright streams of light illuminating the ground where I should have to drop. Every now and then moving shadows showed plainly that inside that window were my watchers, waiting to dispose of my corpse as soon as they had carried out their murderous intentions.

"The house stood by itself, otherwise I might have been able to climb into the next, as I had seen firemen do with ladder. That gave me an idea. If I could rig a ladder of that kind I might reach the roof, cross it and escape by climbing down the water-pipe in front to the street, which probably I should be able to do, thanks to my athletic training at Oxford.

"How quickly a person's wit will act sometimes when death seems near! I looked about the room for material to make the scaling ladder, which seemed my only hope. Two bed slats I found under my mattress luckily. The wire by which were suspended the old soldier's picture and others on the wall bound them securely together. I had a knife which contained a screw-driver. In the cupboard were large strong hooks. Quickly I unscrewed four and put them upside down on my slats. Half-a-dozen chair rungs, which I pulled off the chairs, bound at proper distances on the slats with the picture wire, made my scaling ladder complete, and I thought strong enough to support my weight. If it was not, I should be killed, anyway.

"I looked at my bed. The canopy was three-quarters of the way down. I had no time to lose. Taking the gold, which had been tied lightly in my handkerchief and placed under my pillow by my host, I fastened it about my waist, and in stockinged feet went to the window with my ladder. Peering above I could see the gutter's edge, and, raising the ladder, found it reached, and managed to hook it fast. Then I got out on the window-sill and prepared to mount.



As we sat smoking in the garden after dinner.

"Trying it carefully with my weight, which made it swing inward against the house, thereby holding better. I nerved myself, and stepping from the sill began my perilous ascent. Half way up I thought of the window of the room where the machinery for my suffocation was being worked—but it was too late to retreat, and I must take the chance of not being detected by the worker.

When my head came above the gutter I saw a light inside that room, but the curtain was fortunately drawn over the glass. With trembling arms I raised myself on the ledge, and, quietly pulling the ladder after me, crawled along to the corner of the house. As I expected, the roof had the gutter's ledge all round it, but before I could turn its corner my escape was discovered, and I heard low voices, evidently proceeding from the window out of which I had just climbed. In another moment men with lanterns and a fierce dog were searching the yard, thinking, of course, that I must be in it.

"Not daring to move, and fearing that the bright moon, then breaking through a rift in the clouds, would expose me to the fellows below, I flattened myself against the roof's edge and waited. Then the moon burst forth, shining directly where I hid, and I saw or felt that the searchers had found me, for, leaving the yard, they re-entered the house, and I could hear them calling to the worker in the attic behind me. Like a snake, but quicker, I squirmed round the house corner to its front, found the water-pipe, and, grasping it, let myself over and slid to the street just as the front attic window opened and a head came forth.

"When I stopped running I was far away and safe with my hard-earned gold, though only half dressed; but I found a little inn where the people were honest, and there rested until daybreak among a lot of early-rising market folks, who were too polite to ask questions."

W. T.

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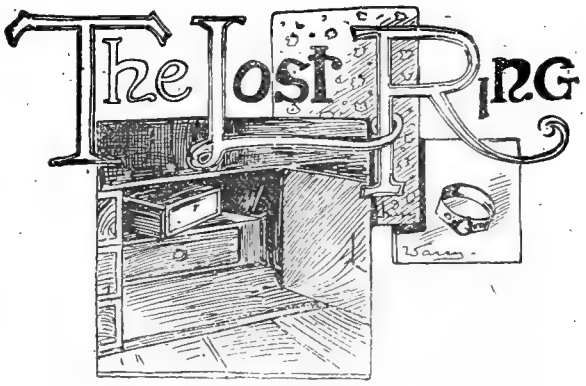

CHAPTER I.

That a ring laid loosely in a drawer, or left among the miscellaneous orders of a dressing-table, should disappear, is not surprising. Gaping dovetails, pilfering maidservants—even that born thief, the magpie—have then to be taken into account. But when a ring has been secured in a jewel case, that case locked into a general cabinet, and the keys carried upon the person, one expects to find the article when wanted. Yet from this double, treble security, the ring had disappeared—vanished into thin air. I stood as one dumfounded, holding the jewel-case in my hand.

The intrinsic value of the lost ring was great; but that was the merest *bagatelle* in my eyes compared with its interest. The ring had a history. It was at once a pledge and a reward. It had been given to my father, while a trader in Russia, by the Tsarewitch, the Grand Duke Alexander, as a reward for an important personal service; and with it had been given the pledge that never would it be presented by father or son without obtaining for the bearer an imperial audience and gracious hearing.

My father, a proud and independent man at heart, had made much of the gift and little of the promise; and when he willed over the article to me, his eldest son, some time before his death, he smiled at the idea that the Tsarewitch's pledge should ever be redeemed. I had treasured the ring with loving care, deeming it the most precious *souvenir* of my lost parent that I possessed. Never could I look upon it without recalling his eventful career and unique character.

And it was this much-treasured *souvenir* that had so mysteriously vanished. The shock of surprise and annoyance that went through me was, I think, accounted for. Not so, however, the strange and instinctive feeling of terror that followed. Looking at the empty jewel-case, I was seized with a fit of horror perfectly unaccountable. My brain reeled, a wave of darkness rushed before my eyes, my knees shook as if about to fail me. When the first spasm passed I sickened; and not till some minutes after I had recourse to the water-jug did I recover, in a measure, my normal powers.

I may here admit that I am of a constitution extremely nervous; and have been all my life susceptible to influences which do not affect, or affect very slightly, my more phlegmatic friends. But an attack such as that I have now described I had never before undergone. Such sensations of deep, of soul-harrowing despair had hitherto been foreign to my experience.

I was unmarried at the time I speak of, and lived in London. My house—I had an antipathy to chambers—was superintended by a housekeeper of mature years. For this woman I rang when I had a little recovered, and impatiently awaited her coming.

Presently she entered, with an excuse on her lips for her tardiness. Her rheumatic spasms, she said, were unusually severe that evening. My housekeeper, I may say, was not a pleasant person to look at, her long nose and heavy eyebrows being her most striking features. Her expression was very difficult to read, from the unpleasant shade under which her eyes resided, and the immobility of the muscles of the mouth. But as far as I could make out, it was not very conciliating.

"Mrs. Benson," I said, with a severity of manner unusual with me, "something very serious has occurred."

"Indeed, sir? I am sorry, Mr. Glapthorne."

The words were uttered rather than expressed. Indeed, it was a characteristic of my housekeeper's tones, as it was of her face, to convey very little.

"A valuable ring has disappeared—disappeared in a manner unaccountable, except on the supposition that some untrustworthy person has access to my keys—or at least to this room. Do you know of any such person, Mrs. Benson?"

My housekeeper replied that only the maid and herself had admittance to that bedroom.

The maid—a bungling country lass—I instantly acquitted of suspicion. As for Mrs. Benson, it seemed ridiculous to suspect her, for not to speak of her severity of character, and the unexceptionable nature of the testimonials she had brought with her, the whole house, with articles of much greater value than the ring, was daily in her power. Yet this theft, so daring, so inexplicable!

"I suppose it would be impossible for anyone to enter the room without the knowledge of the maid or you?"

Mrs. Benson replied in her usual stony manner that such an event would be highly improbable, if not quite impossible.

"Then I am to suppose this solid hoop of gold has been spirited away by pixies or fairies, or something of that sort?" I said, with not unreasonable irritation.

My housekeeper remarked that she had heard of sleep-walkers and others exceptionally constituted unconsciously stealing their own property. On which I lost my temper, and gave Mrs. Benson leave to quit the room.

"You may go," I said angrily, "I shall have this mystery immediately sifted."

She received this implied threat as stonily as she had a day or two before received my compliments on her careful management.

As she turned to go, a confused noise of voices in the street induced me to throw up the window.

There was a crowd and commotion without, but above all the shrill voices of the newsboys came plaintively into the room.

Was it possible I heard aright?

"Assassination of the Tsar! Fearful details!"

Once again the fearful and undefined terror seized me. Once more my sensations were those of anguish and indescribable despair. But the night air blew in my face, and I saved myself from fainting. I staggered back into the room.

CHAPTER II.

In such a condition as I have indicated but vainly would attempt to describe, a man's feelings must be peculiarly susceptible to impression by strange and uncommon incidents. Solely to my condition, then, do I

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ascribe the trepidation with which, on turning from the window, I viewed my housekeeper on her knees in an attitude of ecstatic devotion. Her face seemed transfigured—transformed. The expression, no longer undecided, was one of fierce and exulting triumph, while the kneeling limbs, the clasped hands, the moving lips, conveyed the idea of a thanksgiving prayer. Almost before I could form these ideas she ceased her muttering, rose to her feet, and, subsiding into her old sphinx-like self, quietly quitted the room.

I was dumb with amazement. The events of the evening had been so *bizarre*, so sudden, and if I did not strangely mistake, so marvellously linked together, that I seemed to move in a mist. The unaccountable disappearance of the Tsarewitch's ring, the news of the Tsar's murder, and the fanatical conduct of my housekeeper on hearing of the latter occurrence were facts which connected themselves inseparably in my brain. That I attached a ridiculous importance to Mrs. Benson's conduct, will, no doubt, be the reader's opinion, as it was my own, half-an-hour after the event.

"The old crone grows mad!" I said to myself, feeling all the time that I was imposing on my reason an explanation which it refused to accept.

Finally I put on my hat, and sallying out into the street procured a copy of a newspaper containing the news of the Tsar's assassination. The "fearful details" of the headlines were brief but terrible. There could be no doubt that the giver of the lost ring would soon be autocrat of the Russians.

So strangely do our petty personal interests outweigh at times our humanity, that the loss of the golden hoop was a much more important matter to me that evening than all the sufferings of my exalted fellow-man, the Tsar.

Thus it was, that with the newspaper in my hand containing the painful news, I recollected that I had an acquaintance near by with a *penchant* for the unthankful labours of a detective. Nor was his a futile ambition. Indeed, of all the men of my acquaintance could I least associate Paul Gaston with futility.

I viewed my housekeeper on her knees.

He was thorough and uncompromising in all his doings. Of French blood, a thorough sceptic, with a mind ever on its logical hinges, Gaston tolerated ignorance but abhorred mysticism. Withal, he was no slavish drudge of facts, but could theorise as boldly as the most unpractical philosopher. Still, in spite of its many gifts, Gaston's mind must have had a severe twist before crime, with its petty accessories and details, could have acquired such a fascination for him. I smiled on recollecting the enthusiasm with which my friend, on every possible occasion, was wont to assume his *rôle* of detective, and how he gloried in recounting his frequent successes.

To Gaston's chambers, therefore, I bent my steps. I found him by his fire, poring over a volume Goborian. He heard the object of my visit with delight, and gleefully rubbed his hands when I assured him of the impenetrable mystery surrounding the loss of the ring. He asked a thousand questions as to the situation of the house, the locks of the cabinet, and other mechanical matters. But at length his queries settled on my housekeeper.

So far from being satisfied with my assurance as to her antecedents, he showed great anxiety to see her testimonials and to possess her photograph. The coincidence, which had struck me forcibly, of the Tsar's murder and the theft of the ring he lightly poohpoohed. As to my housekeeper's strange conduct, and the painful physical state into which I had been thrown that evening, I left him completely in ignorance—knowing perfectly well that such matters would have only evoked ridicule from the lively disciple of Voltaire.

Leaving Gaston's, after some general talk, I made my loss known at the police headquarters. Then I returned to my home, to spend a night in restless slumbers and vague uneasy dreams.

Days passed, but neither Paul Gaston nor the Metropolitan detectives seemed to make much progress in the search for my ring. And now, perhaps, I had better explain why I attach such importance to the Tsarewitch's gift. The fact was, I had a younger brother in Russia—a brother who, though then estranged from me through the intrigues of those he deemed his friends, had once been my bosom intimate and dearest confidant. This brother, Ernest by name, held a responsible official position in Russia, and it did not seem beyond the bounds of possibility that circumstances might arise to make the pledge of a Tsar of vast importance to him. I had offered him the ring at our last meeting, but his quarrel with me had been too bitter to allow him to accept.

Quarrel or no quarrel, I felt certain that there was a bond between us that neither space nor death could snap, and I began to regularly connect the feeling of depression which I suffered at intervals from the date of the ring's disappearance with the brother far distant in the land of the white Tsar.

Almost a month had elapsed from that date, when, on returning one evening from business, I found a stranger awaiting me. My heart sank on beholding him. His foreign visage, his furs, his travel-wearied air, inspired me with foreboding.

"You are from Russia?" I burst forth excitedly.

The stranger bowed assent. "I come from your brother," he said in his halting, foreign accent.

I read everything in the man's face.

"He is in danger—in prison, perhaps?"

I anticipated, wringing my hands in an agony of apprehension, and my visitor's silence confirmed my fears.

Presently he stepped towards me and whispered in my ear:

"I have come—*for the ring*."

CHAPTER III.

FOR THE RING! It was the last drop of bitterness in my cup. Controlling my emotion as best I could, I inquired the particulars of my poor brother's disaster.

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It was with astonishment I learnt that Ernest had been charged with political conspiracy, and that certain compromising documents had been found amongst his papers. The present messenger, my brother's secretary, had with difficulty cleared himself from suspicion, and, being privately commissioned by Ernest to come to England, had lost not a moment in delay. It was his opinion that some powerful enemy of Ernest's had skilfully plotted his ruin.

M. Comoski's dismay was indescribable when I informed him that the Tsarewitch's ring was lost. He gave way to his feelings in a manner altogether frantic, beating his breast, wringing his hands, and bursting into immoderate tears.

I rang for refreshments, and the maid answered the bell. Her manner was confused and strange, and on inquiring the cause, I learnt that my housekeeper had left the house some minutes before in great haste, carrying the most important of her effects in a travelling case. Calm as Mrs. Benson was naturally, she had been unable to conceal from the girl that she was labouring under strong excitement. I could not doubt from the maid's particulars that my housekeeper had left me for good.

Here was another startling coincidence! A message from Russia arrives for the lost ring, and my housekeeper takes to flight in the same hour. I explained the situation to Comoski, but he was not able to perceive any accountable connection between the events.

I determined immediately to set the police on the track of the fugitive. We drove to Scotland Yard, and thence to Paul Gaston's chambers. He heard the further particulars of my story with amazement and distress.

Then he said:

"Events have forced my hand a little, and I may tell you one thing, Mr. Clapthorne; two of your late housekeepers credentials were forged. Did it not strike you that the earlier and important testimonials were those of persons deceased at the time of presentation? You see it is so difficult to find out about the doings of people who have died. I persevered, however, and I shall give you undoubted proof that no person of Mrs. Benson's description filled either of the alleged situations."

"You take me by surprise," I said, with truth; "and I thank you for your discovery. Still I confess I should value information as to Mrs. Benson's whereabouts much more than the most startling revelations of her antecedents."

Paul smiled. "There you impinge on a second clue which may prove useful. I discovered by the simple means of shadowing, that Mrs. Benson holds communication with a certain shaggy denizen of the Eastern slums. He is as strange a chap as she is a lady, and roosts in a queer crib on the top flat of a rickety tenement, with nothing between him and the sky but slates."

I started to my feet.

"There is not a moment to be lost! She is there at this moment beyond a doubt. Come, Paul—come, M. Comoski, we will take a couple of detectives and drive there instantly. The ring may be in the man's possession at this moment."

Gaston, not ill-pleased that the matter had reached a crisis, instantly consented.

We all three drove to the Yard, and very quickly re-entered our vehicle, accompanied by two able-bodied police officers. Soon the cab entered upon one of the lowest districts of London, and after some ten minutes driving, Gaston opened the window and ordered the driver to stop.

We got out, and turned the narrow lane, Gaston leading the way. At the end of the lane was a filthy cross alley. Into this we dived, and soon emerged into a street, indescribably dirty and neglected. Scarcely a whole window was to be seen, though, to say the truth, the yellow, sickly street lamps afforded small scope to the vision.

"Here we are," said Gaston, and we were soon climbing the stairs, which he had truly described as rickety. Nothing so frail and untrustworthy in the way of steps had ever come under my feet. Up four flights we went in the stealthy, creeping manner advised by our leader. Then Gaston stopped before a door, and rapped firmly three times with the points of his fingers.

Stealthily the door was opened on chain. We were prepared for that. With unanimous force we threw ourselves against it, and chain and staple gave way. We fell pell-mell into the unlighted lobby.

Quick as we had been, the opener of the door had been quicker. As we fell inward he threw himself into the inner room. Before, however, he could close it against us we were after him.

But the apartment was as dark as pitch, being apparently shuttered and barred. Hurriedly a light was struck, but, to our amazement and disgust, we found ourselves alone.

At that moment the door of the room was closed and barred from without. We realised our position. The tenant had escaped into the lobby by some secret way and made us prisoners.

We threw ourselves against the door, but this time we were overmatched. It was of solid oak, with powerful iron cross-bars. We recognised that, unless we could follow our gaoler's manner of exit, we were effectually caged.

Very soon we discovered the secret trap-door in the wall, but as it, too, was locked on the outside, it afforded us small relief. I cast my eyes despairingly round me. On a table at my side lay a peculiarly-handled umbrella and a pair of gloves—articles which I at once recognised as belonging to Mrs. Benson.

At that moment a strange and overpowering odour arose within the room, and increased to a choking stench. I looked despairingly at my companions as through a densely-gathering mist. Gaston was pale and seemed upon the verge of fainting. I felt my own reason grow confused. Things became still hazier, and at length I remembered no more.

Strange visions passed through my brain as I lay helpless. Forms of exaggerated size moved about me, I felt my pockets being rifled one by one, and all the time I was inanimate—lifeless.

At length consciousness returned. My companions were reclining half-dazed round me. I rose and shook them roughly, and they got up. Gaston took out his watch. It indicated ten minutes to nine. We had left Scotland Yard at fifteen minutes to nine. The inference was obvious. We had been unconscious for at least twelve hours.

On realising the manner in which we had been tricked and overpowered, the detectives looked the most disconcerted of the band, but they instantly proceeded to work. On tearing down the window-shutters, the daylight streamed into the room. They next sent the casement flying into the street. It caused a great crash, and soon a throng collected on the pavement beneath. Making signals from the gaping window-niche we

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speedily attracted attention, and were released from our imprisonment.

I was mad with rage that our prey should have escaped us, but I was soon to have my revenge. We drove to Scotland Yard. A smiling inspector came forward with a photograph in his hand.

"Is this Mrs. Benson?" he asked with a smile.

I recognised my quondam housekeeper, and said so. Comoski was looking over my shoulder.

"Benson!" he said. "This is no Benson. This is Madame Zaleski, proclaimed an enemy and conspirator by the Tsar. I have seen her photo frequently at the police bureau in St. Petersburg."

And in one flash the mystery of the ring came home to me.

Zaleski was the name of the Nihilist from whose hands my father had saved the Tsarewitch's life. He had been ignominiously executed. His mother, mad for revenge, had twice attempted to have my father assassinated. So much I had learned from him, and did not doubt that his enemy and mine were the same. Her hatred had explained a host of mysteries connected with the disappearance of the ring.

I turned to the inspector and asked breathlessly:

"Is she captured?" He nodded.

"And the ring?"

"The ring," said the inspector, stepping to the desk, "the ring is here."

* * * * * *

The remainder of my story must be quickly told. In a word then, the recovered ring was forwarded to St. Petersburg, and proved the means of extricating my brother from the plot in which he had been entangled. At the bottom of the conspiracy Madame Zaleski and a second son had figured.

That a more terrible and successful plot was bound up with this I can only hint. That the part of which I was cognisant had been worked out with an astonishing patience, skill, and forethought cannot be denied. I leave the rest with the reader. There are links in the chain I cannot supply, and for which Paul Gaston's superficial views afford no satisfactory substitute.

Madame Zaleski *alias* Benson is now, with her compatriot, the inmate of a convict prison.

JEROME PARKER.

WHILE this number of S.S. is still current, **Pearson's Magazine** will make its appearance. On Thursday, December 12th, 200,000 copies will be published of this sixpenny monthly.

Though by no means perfect, and very far from being as good as future issues will be, I believe it may without undue boasting be said that no such sixpennyworth has yet been offered to the public.

In our recent numbers enough has been said as to the contents of the **Magazine.** It must now be left to you to decide whether the promises made have been carried out.

Writing with an advance copy of the **Magazine** before me, the chief point with which I am dissatisfied is the *quantity* of the illustrations. The *quality*, I think, leaves little to be desired; but the quantity, though very considerable, is not to my mind sufficient. This is not because of any error in the planning out of the **Magazine,** but owing to disappointments and accidents, which there was no time to rectify, as it was thought desirable to produce the **Magazine** by the day for which it had been announced. Future issues will be illustrated a good deal more profusely.

At the date of penning these lines Number Two is well under way, and I most sincerely wish that it were Number One. The experience gained in arranging the initial issue has resulted in the production of a Second Number, which will, I believe, be considered something quite good.

Our business motto in Henrietta Street has ever been: "There's always room on top." **Pearson's Magazine** has been produced with this motto borne fully in mind.

If the premier position aimed for has been attained, there should be no fears as to its future. If it has not, I am sorry to have bothered you so much unnecessarily.

That £50 IS STILL TO = = = = = BE WON!

IF you have not already tried your hand at the PUZZLE PICTURE in the

EXTRA CHRISTMAS NUMBER

OF

PEARSON'S WEEKLY,

Which is now on Sale, you should do so forthwith.

The amusement and interest derived will alone compensate you for the modest expenditure of Sixpence necessary to purchase our Christmas Number,—not to mention the Three Magnificent Coloured Plates, and the bumper sixpennyworth of stories that are thrown in.

You may send us as many solutions to the PUZZLE PICTURE as you like, but each solution must be made up of the Picture Squares themselves. Figure diagrams will be disqualified.

Advice to those who have already forwarded solutions:

TRY AGAIN!

Advice to all:

TRY! TRY!! TRY!!!

£50 is not to be Sneezed at in these Hard Times.

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In a Polish Mazourka.

"What a picture for Paola Veronese!" exclaimed the elder of the two men who entered the ballroom of the Count Lipiniski in Warsaw.

Commencing at first with a kind of timid hesitation, the lady sways about like a bird taking flight; now gliding like a skater, skimming the ice of the polished floor, now running forward like a sportive child.

Again she recommences her sly, graceful dancing, extending her white arms to the partner who comes to rejoin her, and beginning her spirited steps, which transfers her with magic rapidity from one end of the ballroom to the other.

She glides, she runs, she flies, until, panting and exhausted, she reclines in the arms of her partner, who raises her for a moment in the air with vigorous arm before finishing the last intoxicating round.

It is the national dance, the mazourka, at its height.

The two men, who were tardy guests, watched its progress with eager attention.

The younger was a tall, blonde giant, who by his uniform might be easily recognised as an officer of the Russian Army.

His companion, who was a man of perhaps thirty-five years or thereabouts, gave one the impression directly of a man of letters and refinement, one who had seen much of the world already, but who was still young enough for it to be possible that the best of his life was still lying in the future. Not a handsome man, not a countenance which could ever simper from some "Book of Beauty," but a face which might be engraved on more than one woman's heart.

"How thankful am I to have returned to Warsaw," he said at length.

"And yet your exile was a voluntary one," responded Anton Sougaroff, drawing one end of his long moustache fiercely between his teeth.

"Yes, you are right," responded the other. "I was afraid of myself, and yet all my wanderings have been in vain. I cannot forget three years ago. I cannot forget Delphine Podolski. It is a love which has grown with my life—a love that is more to me than my honour!"

Sougaroff was silent.

He, too, had loved this woman, who had turned the gold of life into dross for his companion.

"Ah!" he exclaimed at last, "here she comes. Shall we join the dance, Stanislas? Guard well your heart," he laughed bitterly. "Three years even will not prove a sufficient shelter for it."

They entered the mazy circle and were soon skimming lightly over the floor in the intricacies of the fascinating mazourka, which they danced with the grace and abandon of native Poles.

The Countess Delphine Podolski was the most beautiful woman in all Poland; the most fascinating, the most dangerous.

She was distinguished by an originality full of fire, a Parisian by her grace and elegance, an Eastern dancing girl in her Asiatic languor. Her manners would caress without emboldening, and in her lustrous eyes might be imagined the luxurious indolence of the sultana. Add to this the attraction of a wonderful intelligence, heightened by a splendid education, and what wonder that her lovers were legion, or that her husband so jealously guarded this precious pearl of his. Such a woman as this would love but once, and the Countess Padolski had not married for love.

The couples whirled on and on, faster and more furious than ever, each lady as the dance progressed advancing with a gentleman towards one end of the ballroom, and thence executing a series of difficult manœuvres to the opposite end.

It is the Countess Podolski's turn. A murmur of admiration arose from the assembled spectators as she glided gracefully over the polished floor, and rested her arm lightly within that of the gentleman who came forward to be her partner.

"Delphine!" he whispered rapturously, gazing down at her.

"Stanislas!" she echoed, looking up.

Their eyes met.

Then he knew for a certainty that the love of three years ago was stronger, if anything, now than before.

And Sougaroff, watching, thought bitterly of the luck which had brought him to the Count Lipinski's, and the evil desire which had prompted him to suggest the joining of the dance to Stanislas Jablonowska.

"How she loves him!" he groaned to himself. "She has never had that glorified look upon her face before since I knew her. That was all that was wanting to make her an angel—the light of love in her eyes. What is he saying to her, I wonder?" as he saw the man's blonde head bending tenderly towards the lady.

A dark thought crossed Sougaroff's mind.

There was the weak-minded old Count loitering near the door of an ante-room in patient attendance upon his lovely wife, and so sure in her fidelity that he never scrutinised her partners.

It was to him that the desperate Russian directed his footsteps.

"She loves him! She will never love me!" he whispered fiercely. "Sooner death to us both than life and her love for him."

"Ah, Count, good evening!" he cried, as the old man arose with a vestige of his court manners and saluted the handsome officer. "How beautiful your wife is looking to-night."

"Yes, yes, I believe so," chuckled the Count. "Delphine looks well in anything, you know."

"That is what her partner seems to be thinking," replied Sougaroff, conveying more by his tone than his words. "Do you notice that look of his? I wonder what he can be saying to cause my lady Countess to blush so deeply."

"What! What are you saying, Sougaroff?" gasped the old man. "Do you mean Delphine? She would never listen to anything. She cares too much for me."

Sougaroff glanced at him half pityingly, half scornfully, then suddenly leaning forward he whispered something in his ear.

"Great Heavens!" cried the Count, starting back.

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"No, it cannot be. If that is so, I will shoot him and her too."

"Not so fast, my friend," remonstrated the Russian. "Don't be so excited. If you want to do anything desperate take your time about it. You haven't the necessary about you, have you?" clicking his fingers in imitation of a pistol.

"No, Sougaroff, I haven't, but I will kill her if I have to choke her," answered Count Podolski, fairly trembling with rage.

"There now, be calm!" admonished the Russian. "Let us take a glass or two of wine; and see, their figure in the mazourka is over, they are going into the conservatory. Follow them, Count, and you will hear enough to satisfy yourself."

"But you, won't you come, too?" pleaded the old man.

"I am going to step out for a few moments;" and he passed into the night air, busy with his thoughts.

"He shall not have her if I cannot!" he vowed to the silent stars. "I vow that he shall never be happy in her love," and in the still silence of the night seemed to ring out the echo—"Man proposes; God disposes."

Meanwhile Delphine, Countess Podolski, and Stanislas Jablonowska, lovers almost from babyhood, strayed into the dim-lighted conservatory, fatigued a little from the entrancing mazes of the mystic dance.

Every cadence of the man's voice vibrated in Delphine's ear as the echo of the vanished love, the tender declaration of three years ago.

What words, vows, vague hopes had been negligently thrown out during this mazourka.

Ah, but three short years ago and she had thought to find her life's destiny in this man who now stood by her side, so wild and despairing, who had, or could have, no possible claim upon her, and yet of whom forgetfulness had become for ever impossible to her.

"Stanislas, we must never meet again. Oh! why did you come back to me?" she implored, her cheeks burning more through the excitement of emotion than from physical fatigue.

For answer he stooped reverently, and raising one of her tiny hands with the peculiar Slavic *finesse* and delicacy of manner, pressed it to his heart.

"Can you tell me why I returned?" he questioned tenderly. "When I heard you were married I could not believe my senses, but when you refused to see me and passed me in company with your husband, without even a salutation, then I believed all reports, and left Poland as far behind as I could. But to what avail, Delphine? Is there any power an earth sufficient to uproot a love once established?"

"No," responded the Countess. "You know the reports I heard concerning your fidelity, and the almost insurmountable proofs that were furnished me. Afterwards I found them all to be false. I was alone—you had left me. There was one man who constantly sought my hand. Add to this my parents' persuasions, nay, almost commands, and you have the story of my marriage."

"One word, Delphine," interrupted her companion. "Who was your informer as to my constancy?"

"He was yours, also, I imagine," uttered the Countess softly.

"Impossible! Not Sougaroff, who came to me with tears in his eyes and advised me to leave the country at the time of your marriage?"

"The same," answered the lady. "What is it—what is the matter, Stanislas?"

"Did you hear the rustling?" asked the man, looking curiously at a huge palm near the entrance of the conservatory.

"No, I heard nothing," said Delphine; "and now that you are to leave me to-night, Heaven will forgive me if I tell you that you are the only man I have ever loved, and I have been true to you, Stanislas. That I vow. But now we must never meet; you must never speak to me again of these things. They belong to the past, and with us the past should lie among the forgotten things of life."

"And if we cannot forget?" asked her companion; "if our ghost will not be laid, what then? I have found three years of desperate effort useless, gone like a mist at the sight of your face, at the touch of your hand."

"Hush, Stanislas! I have said we must forget. If you care for me, help me to forget. Oh, Stanislas! be my good angel, not my evil one."

"I will, darling, I will," he said solemnly. "I will leave you to-night. Heaven help me to keep away from you. The place you have left is empty, and no other can fill it after you. You have made that impossible," he concluded brokenly. "My heart is like a sealed grave—it is too full of its own dead to let in the living."

The crush of the dancers came nearer to them and nearer—into the conservatory they burst, and cried:

"Countess Podolski and partner. You are wanted for the final round," and out again into the crowded ball room these two glided, their lives to be separated by this final dance, though their hearts were in union for eternity.

"There is my husband dancing," exclaimed Delphine wonderingly. "How strange; he has never taken part before to my knowledge, and he is to be my *vis-à-vis*."

The fury of the mazourka increased. The music seemed to have entered into the blood of the revellers, for they were like mad creatures, rushing here, there, everywhere, in seeming confusion, in reality in perfect order.

Count and Countess Podolski are facing each other for the last round.

They advance, retreat, advance again.

Bang! Bang! Bang!

Three pistol shots, a cloud of smoke, a frightened crowd of dancers in their fancy garbs, and three souls, a moment before in possession of perfect consciousness, gone to their final reckoning.

By some trick of Fate, Stanislas Jablonowski had fallen backwards, and Delphine, Countess Podolski, lay almost in his arms, the smile occasioned by his last words still lighting up her face.

"Oh, oh!" the world whispered. "The old Count went mad and through jealousy shot his wife and her lover and then turned a ball upon himself. Well, they were always a strange family."

And Sougaroff? He retired from the world.

There are two things he can never bear. He has never seen the little Countess Podolski, who is said to bear such a striking resemblance to her mother, and he cannot listen to the music of a Polish mazourka.

E. Garnet.

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A Severed Hand

IT was while staying with my friend, Tom Grantham, at his father's parsonage in the quaint little town of Retford, that I met the St. Cyrile girls. They were famous all the country over for their beauty; in fact, it is safe to say that no single family in Westmoreland, and perhaps in all England, contained the equals in physical loveliness of these three sisters. Their family was an old one, very old, and their grim, grey-headed old father was as proud as his lineage was lofty and his income scant.

They were all blondes of the purest North of England type. Maud, the eldest, was the tallest of the three, and a veritable queen in her manner and gait. Laura, the second, was almost as stately, and had the same royal poise of the head as her elder sister. But it was Eunice, the youngest, a child of seventeen, who, to my mind, carried off the palm as the fairest of the three.

And it was of Eunice, with her soft cheeks of cream and rose, that my friend Tom was enamoured.

He had left school three years before me, and was now a lieutenant in the army, but our friendship had not been forgotten. Tom was the idol of his father and mother, and as handsome a young officer as any to be found in Her Majesty's army.

His beauty was quite the opposite to Eunice's. He was very tall and broad-shouldered for his twenty-three years, and had thick, coal-black eyebrows and hair. His face was as yet innocent of a moustache, but his resolute mouth and squarely set jaws, gave it all the manliness necessary.

I remembered how bitterly I envied him when he slipped Eunice's arm into his own in the church porch and led the way towards the St. Cyriles' house, while I followed with Maud and Laura, to whom I had previously been introduced. I defy the world to produce a handsomer pair than these two. Eunice's head reached scarcely to her lover's shoulder, and the bewitching yet childlessly innocent way she had of glancing up into his face would have lured a life-long hermit from his solitude to woo her.

In the course of the three weeks I spent at Retford I had plenty of opportunities for observing how violent, how desperate, was my friend's passion. Indeed, he spoke to me of it often himself. Young as he was, his speech was that of a man who has made his cast for all that he values in life, and is determined to abide by the issue. Boy though I might be, I could see that it was a case of life or death with him.

Eunice's father, who was as prudent as most widowers are, had given a reluctant consent to their engagement, but insisted on an improvement in the young man's worldly position as a condition to the settling of the wedding day. And how a poor lieutenant, and the son of a country parson at that, was to overcome that condition it was hard to perceive.

I had been a guest of the Grantham's for about ten days when a visitor came to the St. Cyrile's. He was a retired Indian merchant, with a saffron complexion and small piercing eyes, but fabulously rich, so they said. He treated Tom and myself with quite evident condescension when we dined with the family a couple of days afterwards.

His name was Denton, and he talked of buying property in the neighbourhood. From the first moment I noticed his marked attention to Eunice, and I could not help shuddering at the sight of that evil face so close to hers. By Tom's pallor, too, I was aware that he felt as I did. It was a dismal dinner, and though the merchant ate enormously, I do not think any of the rest enjoyed it.

All through the next week Tom was taciturn and unsociable. He failed to rhapsodise to me about Eunice, and I felt instinctively that some evil was about to happen.

Shall I ever forget that night when she, whom my boyish fancy had pictured as a seraph, fell headlong

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from the pinnacle upon which I had placed her? I can see her now, as she stood an hour before it happened, by Tom's side, looking up into his face with the smile of an angel out of Heaven.

We were again dining at old St. Cyrile's. It was a farewell dinner, given in my honour, for I was to leave on the morrow. The party was gay enough, though the elderly Indian merchant (who, by the way, appeared to be on the closest terms of intimacy with the master of the house) appeared to still regard our presence as an intrusion.

The evening sped quickly. It was about ten o'clock; Maud and Laura were at the piano, busy with a duet, and Tom was turning their music.

Without thinking where the others could be, I stepped out on the verandah and lighted a cigarette. It was a perfect night. The air was filled with the warmth of early summer, and the moon lit up the tops of the birch trees in the meadow beyond the garden, while far across the fields gleamed Allswater lake like a broad strip of silver.

Suddenly there came two figures pacing slowly across the lawn—Denton and Eunice. I gasped with astonishment, for the merchant's arm was about the girl's slim waist; and they walked so until they came close beneath the place where I stood, when they stopped.

The wall behind me was covered with ivy and they could not see me, and just as I was about to make my presence known—oh, shame and confusion—I saw the girl's snowy neck bend, and her head droop upon the stranger's shoulder. Then he took her face between his hands and kissed her on the mouth.

I barely repressed a cry, for that moment I felt a hand grip my arm with the force of a vice, the fingers fairly sinking into my flesh. The pair on the lawn walked slowly round to another door of the house with arms about each other, as lovers walk, Eunice looking like a spirit in her clinging white dress. Then I turned and looked into the face of Tom Grantham, and the look of agony there I hope I shall never see again in the face of a human being.

When we returned to the drawing-room presently, Denton and Eunice were there. She was as fair and unruffled as the saint I had thought her. Denton held an envelope in his hand which he handed to Tom. "A telegram for you, lieutenant," he said coldly. "I took it from a boy at the gate. Your father, it seems, sent it on here."

Tom took the telegram and read it. I marvelled at his composure. "The regiment is ordered to Africa," he said, and thrust the paper in his pocket.

Eunice gave a heart-breaking shriek and rushed upon him.

"How very unfortunate!" observed Denton, with a perceptible sneer.

Grantham turned about and struck him to the floor with a blow from his fist. Then he strode from the room without a glance behind him. Eunice fainted. Her two sisters were too busy attending to her to notice me, and their father was nowhere to be seen. Feeling my presence unnecessary, I followed my friend just as the fallen merchant from India was preparing to rise.

How I came to be a passenger on the troopship that carried the —th from Plymouth does not matter much. The commercial house that commanded my valuable services had some affairs to settle at Cape Town, and as I was the only person in the office ready to volunteer for the mission, my offer was eagerly accepted.

Though I was young my employers were good enough to admit that I had brains. To settle this business was an easy matter, and having a taste for adventure, it wasn't difficult—everything considered, including a little distance—to seek out my friend Tom at the headquarters of his regiment.

How he managed it I do not know, but when I obtained permission to accompany the —th in the guise of a war correspondent, or anything else I might choose to call myself (on condition that I kept out of sight at the proper time, and refrained from talking too much), I availed myself of the privilege with the ardour of a schoolboy let out for a holiday.

The campaign has gone into history, and it is not my purpose to describe it, or justify it either, for that matter. The part played by the —th was not a conspicuous one, hard marches through a dreadful, rough country, with very little to eat and a broiling sky over our heads, were for long our sternest lot.

I watched her standing in the high-backed St. Cyrile pew.

On these long marches, and in the quiet watches about the camp-fire, my friend never once spoke of his great sorrow. From the tenor of his conversation, however, I could easily perceive that life had no charm left for him, and that he would welcome as a boon the chance shot or assegai thrust that could end it. His hair, too, was growing grey. Think of it—a soldier, three years out of school, and grey at twenty-four.

When we heard of the death of the Prince Imperial, the widowed Eugénie's only son, Tom sighed and said he envied him. When news reached us of the awful catastrophe of Rorke's Drift, where so many brave fellows went down, he gritted his teeth and vowed he would like to strike a blow for vengeance before the war was done.

The final battle of Ulundi, which was followed shortly by the capture of Cetewayo and the termination of the war, was a most bloody affair. It was here that the —th performed its magnificent and almost only service of the campaign.

Through the long afternoon the Zulu warriors fought with the superb ferocity that has marked them out as the heroes of all the savage tribes. Their superior numbers availed them little. Again and again, with dauntless bravery, they hurled themselves upon the

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British line, only to be slaughtered in masses by the murderous artillery fire. They were doomed, and they knew it; but black and naked as they were, they swarmed to their fate and died like men.

But too many of Her Majesty's soldiers were falling; the victory was being delayed too long. At last the —th received the coveted order to charge and put the black hordes to rout.

By some means or other a sort of fever had got into my blood. I did not ache to go into action, but certain smiles and witticisms exchanged by some of the officers in my hearing had produced a desire in me to show that, though not a professional warrior hired to kill blackamoors at so much a day, I was not wholly without courage.

This was why I had sidled dexterously upon my grey mare until I was within a few paces of Tom, who sat motionless in his saddle, calm as an icicle, with a red spot on each of his cheeks. I had pistols in my holsters and a good cavalry sabre in my hand, and when the trumpet sounded the charge, and that superb body of horse went thundering over the plain, something seemed to snap in my head, and away I went, involuntarily, perhaps, but with an insane desire to take part in the fray.

A couple of troopers, pierced through the breast with assegais, fell crashing from their saddles, and I came up with the advancing line at a furious gallop. In another instant we were in the mass of savages. In a sort of dream I saw a sea of fierce black faces about me. Some of the savages crouched under the bellies of the horses, and disembowelled them as they were trampled under foot. Others, giants in stature, stood straight up, with their brawny naked arms raised to heaven, and actually laughed as the troops cut them down. These blacks knew no fear. In solid detachments they stood before the onslaught of the enemy, no man flinching before the certain death that was imminent, as each fought desperately against the trained troops of a powerful country.

I saw Tom's face, set and stern, as he hewed about him like a templar of old, one hand gripping his bridle rein, and in the other his deadly sabre rising aloft, and falling to cleave a woolly skull.

For myself, I suppose I was fighting like the rest. I was conscious only of a wild feeling of exhilaration—a sort of composed joy that I was a participator in such a matchless scene. I felt a spear thrust that pierced the fleshy part of my arm above the elbow, and slashed mechanically at the head of the gigantic savage who had dealt me the wound.

And just as suddenly as the attack began the heroic foemen melted away. With loud cries they turned and fled. In all directions they scattered, leaving the dead upon the field. The quick African dusk was stealing down as the trumpets sounded a retirement, and I drew rein with the rest. The battle of Ulundi was won, and the Zulu war was over.

Many and many a gallant trooper lay prone upon the rank grass. Some were clasped in the embrace of a black foe with whom they had fought to the death. And as I paused, watching the flight of the vanquished enemy, there came upon me a most terrible apparition.

Lieutenant Grantham threw his charger back upon his haunches in front of me. His helmet was gone and his black hair disordered, while a thin stream of blood trickled down his cheek. "Ha!" he shrieked, "is it not glorious, this—this butchery? It is the first thing I have found yet that could make me FORGET!"

I felt my hair rising on end, for I saw by the glare in the man's eyes that he was a maniac. And then (I can see the dreadful picture as I write) he slowly raised his left arm, and I saw that his left hand had been almost severed at the wrist. It was hanging by a mere thread of flesh.

Eunice gave a heart-breaking shriek and rushed upon him.

"See!" he screamed, as I tried to catch his bridle and lead him from the field. "See, my boy, they gave me as good as I brought"—holding the ghastly, blood-streaming hand aloft. "I am going now—for ever. This hand has her ring upon it. Take it back to her and say I sent it."

With a wild yell he wheeled his charger and dashed headlong all alone after the fugitive black rabble, leaving his terrible relic behind him. I tried to follow him, but weakened perhaps by the loss of blood from the wound in my arm, I reeled and fell from my saddle to the ground.

For days afterwards we searched for him. Dead or alive, he was never found. Was he captured or cut to pieces by the vanquished foe, or does he live to-day in the African forests among the savages, saved by his madness from a knowledge of his fate?

To England the report went back with the rest of the tragic list: "Lieut. Thomas Grantham—missing."

In a quiet English village a white-haired clergyman and his wife wait in vain for the son who never comes back.

Mrs. Denton, they say, is quite the belle of the county, and her diamonds are the admiration and envy of all the country-side.

It is a spiteful thought, but sometimes I wish I could have found that hand, with the diamond ring upon it, on the field of Ulundi, to bring back to her as I was bidden.

J. T. WEARE.

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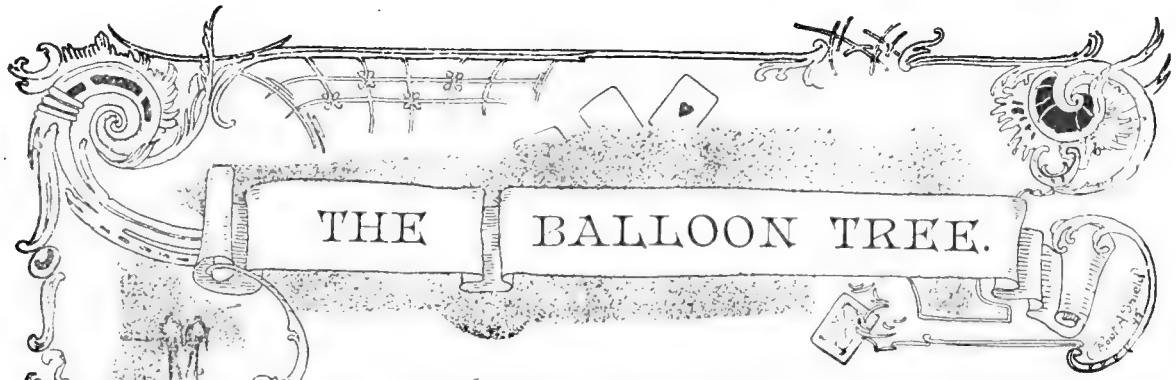

THE BALLOON TREE.

THE Colonel said:

"We rode for several hours straight towards the heart of the island. The sun was low in the western sky when we left the ship. Neither on the water nor on the land had we felt a breath of air stirring. The glare was upon everything. Over the low range of hills miles away in the interior hung a few copper-coloured clouds. 'Wind,' said Briery. Kilooa shook his head.

"Vegetation of all kinds showed the effects of the long continued drought. The eye wandered without relief from the sickly russet of the undergrowth, so dry in places that leaves and stems crackled under the horses' feet, to the yellowish brown of the thirsty trees that skirted the bridle-path. No growing thing was green except the bell-top cactus, fit to flourish in the crater of a living volcano.

"Kilooa leant over in his saddle and tore from one of these plants its top, as big as a Californian pear, and bloated with juice. He crushed the bell in his fist, and, turning, flung into our hot faces a few grateful drops of water.

"Then the guide began to talk rapidly in his language of vowels and liquids. Briery translated for my benefit.

"The god Lalala loved a woman of the island. He came in the form of fire. She, accustomed to the ordinary temperature of the clime, only shivered before his approaches. Then he wooed her as a shower of rain, and won her heart. Kakal was a divinity, much more powerful than Lalala, but malicious to the last degree. Healso coveted the woman, who was very beautiful. Kakal's importunities were in vain. In spite, he changed her to a cactus, and rooted her to the ground under the burning sun; the god Lalala was powerless to avert this vengeance, but he took up his abode with the cactus woman, still in the form of a rain-shower, and never left her, even in the driest weather. Thus it happens that the bell-top cactus is an unfailing reservoir of pure, cold water.

"Long after dusk we reached the channel of a vanished stream, and Kilooa led us for several miles along its dry bed. We were exceedingly tired when the guide bade us dismount. He tethered the panting horses, and then dashed into the dense thicket on the bank. A hundred yards of scrambling and we came to a poor thatched hut. The savage raised both hands above his head and uttered a musical falsetto, not unlike the yodel peculiar to the Valais. This call brought out the occupant of the hut, upon whom Briery flashed the light of his lantern. It was an old woman, hideous beyond the imagination of a dyspeptic's dream.

"'Omanana gelaal!' exclaimed Kilooa.

"'Hail, holy woman,' translated Briery.

"Between Kilooa and the holy hag there ensued a long colloquy, respectful on his part, sententious and impatient on hers. Briery listened with eager attention. Several times he clutched my arm, as if unable to repress his anxiety. The woman seemed to be persuaded by Kilooa's arguments or won by his intreaties. At last she pointed towards the south-east, slowly pronouncing a few words that apparently satisfied my companions.

"The direction indicated by the holy woman was still towards the hills, but twenty or thirty degrees to the left of the general course, which we had pursued since leaving the shore.

"'Push on! push on!' cried Briery. 'We can afford to lose no time.'

* * * * * *

"We rode all night. At sunrise there was a pause of hardly ten minutes for the scanty breakfast supplied by our haversacks. Then we were again in the saddle, making our way through a thicket that grew more and more difficult, and under a sun that grew hotter.

"'Perhaps,' I remarked finally to my taciturn friend, 'you have no objection to telling me now why two civilised beings and one amiable savage should be plunging through this infernal jungle, as if they were on an errand of life or death?'

"'Yes,' said he, 'it is best you should know.'

"Briery produced from an inner breast-pocket a letter which had been read and re-read until it was worn in the creases.

"'This,' he went on, 'is from Professor Quakversuch of the University of Upsala. It reached me at Valparaiso.'

"Glancing cautiously round, as if he feared that every tree fern in that tropical wilderness was an eavesdropper, or that the hood-like spathes of the giant caladiums overhead were ears waiting to drink in some mighty secret of science, Briery read in a low voice from the letter of the Swedish botanist:

"'You will have in those islands a rare opportunity to investigate certain extraordinary accounts given me years ago by the Jesuit missionary, Buteaux, concerning the Migratory Tree, the *cereus vagrans* of Jansenius and other speculative physiologists.

"'The explorer Spohr claims to have beheld it; but there is reason, as you know, for accepting all of Spohr's statements with caution.

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"'That is not the case with the assertion of my late valued correspondent, the Jesuit missionary. Father Buteaux was a learned botanist, an accurate observer, and a most pious and conscientious man. He never saw the Migratory Tree; but during the long period of his labours in that part of the world he accumulated, from widely different sources, a mass of testimony as to its existence and habits.

"'Is it quite inconceivable, my dear Briery, that somewhere in the range of Nature there is a vegetable organism as far above the cabbage, let us say, in complexity and potentiality, as the ape is above the polyp? Nature is continuous. In all her schemes we find no chasms, no gaps. There may be missing links in our books and classifications and cabinets, but there are none in the organic world. Is not all of lower nature struggling upward to arrive at the point of self-consciousness and volition? In the unceasing process of evolution, differentiation, improvement in special function, why may not a plant arrive at this point, and feel, will, act—in short, possess and exercise the characteristics of the true animal?'

"Briery's voice trembled with enthusiasm as he read this passage:

"'"I have no doubt' (continued Professor Quakversuch) 'that if it shall be your great good fortune to encounter a specimen of the Migratory Tree described by Buteaux, you will find that it possesses a well-defined system of real nerves and ganglia, constituting, in fact, the seat of vegetable intelligence. I conjure you to be very thorough in your dissections. According to the indications furnished me by the Jesuit, this extraordinary tree should belong to the order of Cactaceæ. It should be developed only in conditions of extreme heat and dryness. Its roots should be hardly more than rudimentary, affording a precarious attachment to the earth. This attachment it should be able to sever at will, soaring up into the air and away to another place selected by itself, as a bird shifts its habitation. I infer that these migrations are accomplished by means of the property of secreting hydrogen gas, with which it inflates itself out of the ground and off to a new abode. Buteaux added that the Migratory Tree was invariably worshipped by the natives as a supernatural being, and that the mystery thrown by them round its cult was the greatest obstacle in the path of the investigator.'

"'"There!' exclaimed Briery, folding up Professor Quakversuch's letters; 'is not that a question worthy the risk or sacrifice of life itself? To add to the recorded facts of vegetable morphology the proved existence of a tree that wanders, a tree that wills, a tree perhaps that thinks—this is glory to be won at any cost! The lamented De Candolle of Geneva——'

"'"Confound the lamented De Candolle of Geneva!' shouted I, for it was excessively hot, and I felt that we had come on a fool's errand.

* * * * * *

"It was near sunset on the second day of our journey when Kilooa, who was riding several yards in advance of us, uttered a quick cry, leapt from his saddle, and stooped to the ground.

"Briery was at his side in an instant. I followed with less agility; my joints were very stiff, and I had no scientific enthusiasm to lubricate them. Briery was on his hands and knees, eagerly examining what seemed to be a recent disturbance of the soil. The savage was prostrate, rubbing his forehead in the dust as if in a religious ecstasy, and warbling the same falsetto notes that we had heard at the holy woman's hut.

"'What beast's trail have you struck?' I demanded.

"'The trail of no beast,' answered Briery almost angrily. 'Do you see this broad, round abrasion of the surface, where a heavy weight has rested? Do you see these little troughs in the fresh earth, radiating from the centre like the points of a star? They are the scars left by slender roots torn up from their shallow beds. Do you see Kilooa's hysterical performance? I tell you we are on the track of the Sacred Tree. It has been here not long ago.'

"Acting under Briery's excited instructions, we continued the hunt on foot. Kilooa started towards the east, I towards the west, and Briery took the southward course.

"To cover the ground thoroughly we agreed to advance in gradually-widening zigzags, communicating with each other at intervals by pistol shots. There could have been no more foolish arrangement. In a quarter of an hour I had lost my head and my bearings in a thicket. In another quarter of an hour I discharged my revolver repeatedly, without getting a single response from east or south. I spent the remainder of daylight in a blundering effort to make my way back to the place where the horses were; and then the sun went down, leaving me in sudden darkness, alone in a wilderness of the extent and character of which I had not the faintest idea.

"I will spare you the history of my sufferings during the whole of that night, and the next day, and the next day, and another day. When it was dark I wandered about in blind despair, longing for daylight, not daring to sleep or even to stop, and in continual terror of the unknown dangers that surrounded me. In the daytime I longed for night, for the sun scorched its way through the thickest roof that the luxuriant foliage afforded, and drove me nearly mad. The provisions in my haversack were exhausted. My canteen was on my saddle; I should have died of thirst had it not been for the bell-top cactus, which I found twice. But in that horrible experience, neither the torture of hunger and thirst nor the torture of heat equalled the misery of the thought that my life was to be sacrificed to the delusion of a crazy botanist, who had dreamed of the impossible.

"The impossible?

"On the second afternoon, still staggering aimlessly on through the jungle, I lost my last strength and fell to the ground. Despair and indifference had long since given way to an eager desire for the end. I closed my eyes with an indescribable relief; the hot sun seemed pleasant on my face as consciousness departed.

"Did a beautiful and gentle woman come to me while I lay unconscious, and take my head in her lap, and put her arms round me? Did she press her face to mine, and in a whisper bid me have courage? That was the belief that filled my mind when I struggled back for a moment into consciousness. I clutched at the warm, soft arms, and swooned again.

"Do not look at each other and smile, gentlemen; in that cruel wilderness, in my helpless condition, I found pity and benignant tenderness. The next time my senses returned I saw that something *was* bending over me—something majestic, if not beautiful; humane, if not human; gracious, if not woman. The arms that held me and drew me up were moist, and they throbbed with the pulsation of life. There was a faint, sweet odour, like the smell of a woman's perfumed hair. The touch was a caress, the clasp an embrace.

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"Can I describe its form? No, not with the definiteness that would satisfy the Quakversuchs and Brierys. I saw that the trunk was massive. The branches that lifted me from the ground and held me carefully and gently were flexible and symmetrically disposed. Above my head there was a wreath of strange foliage, and in the midst of it a dazzling sphere of scarlet. The scarlet globe grew while I watched it; but the effort of watching was too much for me.

"It seemed the most natural thing in the world that in my extreme weakness I should be beloved and cared for by a cactus. I did not seek an explanation of this good fortune, nor try to analyse it; I simply accepted it as a matter of course, as a child accepts a benefit from an unexpected quarter. The one idea that possessed me was that I had found an unknown friend, instinct with womanly feeling, and immeasurably kind.

"And as night came on it seemed to me that the scarlet bulb overhead became enormously distended, so that it almost filled the sky. Was I gently rocked by the supple arms that still held me? Were we floating off together into the air? I did not know nor care. Now I fancied that I was in my berth on board ship, cradled by the swell of the sea; now, that I was sharing the flight of some great bird; now, that I was borne on with prodigious speed through the darkness by my own volition. The sense of incessant motion affected all my dreams. Whenever I awoke I felt a cool breeze steadily beating against my face—the first breath of air since we had landed. I was vaguely happy. I had surrendered all responsibility for my own fate. I had gained the protection of a being of superior powers.

* * * * *

"'The brandy flask, Kilooa!'

"It was daylight. I lay upon the ground, and Briery was supporting my shoulders. In his face was a look of bewilderment that I shall never forget.

"'My God!' he cried; 'and how did you get here? We gave up the search two days ago.'

"The brandy pulled me together. I staggered to my feet and looked round. The cause of Briery's extreme amazement was apparent at a glance. We were not in the wilderness. We were at the shore. There was the bay and the ship at anchor, half a mile off. They were already lowering a boat to send for us.

"And there to the south was a bright red spot on the horizon, hardly bigger than the morning star—the Balloon Tree returning to the wilderness. I saw it, Briery saw it, the savage Kilooa saw it. We watched it till it vanished. We watched it with different emotions—Kilooa with superstitious reverence, Briery with scientific interest and intense disappointment; I with a heart full of wonder and gratitude.

"I clasped my forehead with both hands. It was no dream, then. The tree, the caress, the embrace, the scarlet bulb, the night journey through the air, were not creations and incidents of delirium. Call it tree, or call it plant-animal—there it was! Let men of science quarrel over the question of its existence in nature; this I know: *It had found me dying, and had brought me more than a hundred miles straight to the ship to which I belonged.* Under Providence, gentlemen, that sentient and intelligent vegetable organisation had saved my life."

* * * * *

At this point the Colonel got up and left the club. He was very much moved. Pretty soon Briery came in, briskly as usual. He picked up an uncut copy of Lord Bragmuch's "Travels in Kerguelen's Land," and settled himself in an easy chair at the corner of the fire-place.

Young Traddles timidly approached the veteran globe-trotter. "Excuse me, Mr. Briery," said he, "but I should like to ask you a question about the Balloon Tree. Were there scientific reasons for believing that its sex was——"

"'Ah," interrupted Briery, looking bored; "the Colonel has been favouring you with that extraordinary narrative? Has he honoured me again with a share in the adventure? Yes? Well, did we bag the game this time?"

"Why, no," said young Traddles; "you last saw the tree as a scarlet spot against the horizon."

"Ah!" said Briery calmly, beginning to cut the leaves of his book.

Richard Sibert.

Google

The Sculptor's Revenge

Translated from the French of Rene Margeary.

CHAPTER I.

At the end of the long, silent studio, where the sun's golden arrows broke against the round, lead-circled windows, sat Esteban Cucharez, the greatest sculptor in all Spain. Leaning upon his elbow, his eyes fixed dreamily upon a priestly missal, illuminated by a pious hand long turned to dust, he chanted to himself in a broken voice the mournful voices which tell of the Passion.

The plaster upon the bare walls was blackened with strange sketches; of bodies writhing in fearful torment, of heads with eyes whose light was almost quenched with tears, with hair damp and matted by the sweat of anguish, and lips close pressed that never more would open to the supreme cry of agony. Scattered about in confusion were the tools of the sculptor, amongst them pieces of ivory—hardly touched, as if the artist had cast them from him in despair—and upon the worn pavement, barring off one end of the studio, lay a great cross of black wood.

Some weeks had passed since the Bishop of Burgos had ordered Esteban Cucharez to make a crucifix for the high altar of the cathedral, and during that time he had remained in his *atelier*, opening the door to no one, living like those fervent anchorites who dwell in desert solitude, haunted by mystic visions.

Absorbed in his work, he was indifferent to all else. He forgot Dolores, his beautiful young bride, leaving her alone day after day in the great, gloomy house, where music and laughter never echoed. She was weary of life and of her husband—forty years her senior—who had no other passion than his art, and by whose side she seemed like a lily drooping in the shadow of a ruined wall. While she sat upon the balcony listlessly fanning herself, the sculptor carved his bits of ivory or made new sketches.

When exhausted he would throw himself down upon his hard couch, his sleep would be broken by dreams of bodies twisted with pain, and he woke in despair of ever being able to fashion an image, whose mournful face and muscles knotted in agony, should express more eloquently than ever before the bitter anguish that our Saviour suffered in the awful night of Golgotha.

CHAPTER II.

It had been an unlucky day for the gallant Captain Don José Santabalzo; the Goddess of Chance had not once repaid with her golden smile his faithful worship. It was twilight when, with empty pockets, he left the gaming table and turned his steps homewards. With spurs jingling and sword tapping against his heels, he walked leisurely along the quiet street which led to his lodging, glancing upwards occasionally at the iron-barred windows.

The captain was about to enter his house when he perceived upon a balcony across the way the Señora Cucharez, sitting motionless, leaning wearily her cheek upon her hand.

"By San José, my holy patron," said he to himself, "it would be indeed a benevolent and worthy task to make cheerful that poor girl." And raising his hat with a gallant gesture he saluted, very respectfully, the fair unknown. Dolores' face brightened with a smile, and she let fall from her corsage a half faded bouquet. As reverently as a pious monk handles some precious relic, Don José picked up the flowers and covered them with kisses.

Thus the romance began. For several days thereafter at the same calm, twilight hour the scene was repeated. Then they commenced to exchange letters, whose phrases vibrated like the music of a serenade, and in whose lines one could trace the fierce tumult of the writer's heart.

Soon Dolores knew the poignant anxiety of waiting behind a church pillar, or in the deep shadow of the

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confessional, the coming of her friend. With what lagging feet the moments flew, and how she started with affright at every sound that broke the silence! With what straining eyes she would search the empty nave, sometimes half-believing she could see her husband emerging from the gloom, seeking her mad with rage!

Little by little these fears forsook her. Then, each night, she would come gliding cautiously along the corridor and down the long winding staircase, the bare feet noiseless upon the stones, stopping at the least sound, pausing a long time by the door of Esteban's studio, and listening for his deep breathing as he lay asleep upon his hard couch, worn out with fatigue. Then the door at the foot of the stairs would be softly opened, another figure would enter the silent house, and together they would clamber the staircase. They thought not of the morrow, and Fate sent no warning of when the end of their dream would come, or how.

Meanwhile, the great black cross still lay upon the floor of the *atelier*, and the figure of Christ, which the Bishop of Burgos had commanded, hung not yet upon its arms. Inspiration came not to the master as of old, and he suffered cruelly in spirit, seeing himself forced to avow his inability, and to renounce the work which he had dreamed should make his glory fadeless. He fancied he could hear the mocking words of the other sculptors, and see the pitying smile on the face of the priests. Then the tears rolled down his wrinkled cheeks.

At last, after months of bitter anguish, late one night he threw down his tools in despair and resolved to abandon his task. For the first time he thought of his young wife, whose velvet eyes and red lips he had so long forgotten. He cursed his art. He would implore her pardon for his past neglect, and in her sympathy would find a balm for his shattered hopes and his broken pride. At that late hour she would be sound asleep, and as he directed his steps towards her chamber, he pictured to himself her surprise and bewilderment when she awoke.

But, pushing open the door, Esteban staggered like a drunken man, and would have fallen had he not supported himself against the wall. By the brilliant moonlight streaming through the window, he saw Dolores and Don José sitting on a couch where they had fallen asleep.

The old man regarded them fixedly for a few moments. Then his thin lips curled with an evil smile. He spoke not a word, but his face was distorted with terrible rage as he fixed both hands upon Don José's throat with a vice-like grip. The captain struggled for an instant, his lips parted convulsively, his eyes seemed starting from their sockets, and then he fell back, limp and senseless. Dolores sprang up, shivering, insane with terror, filling the room with her cries.

"Be quiet," commanded Esteban, striking her brutally in the face. "Your lover is not dead. I know a good remedy which will revive him quickly."

Then, with superhuman strength, he lifted upon his back the inert body of Don José, and, driving his wife before him, carried it to the deserted studio.

"What are you going to do?" she moaned, wringing her hands despairingly.

Cucharez did not respond, except to mutter between his teeth some incoherent phrases.

"The bishop need fear no more delay," said he. "He will have his crucifix, and the sculptors will not rail at me after all."

He extended the body upon the cross that cumbered the flagstones with its black bulk.

"What are you going to do?" repeated Dolores.

"Bring me the hammer and the spikes," he commanded, and as she stirred not to obey, he struck her such a blow that she fell upon the floor.

"Did you hear?" he said.

She brought him the tools.

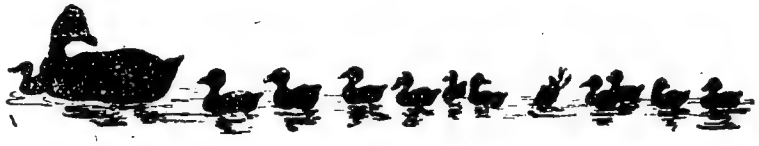
"Mark well," continued he, "how Cucharez avenges his honour."

He rolled up his sleeves and knelt beside the cross. Stretching out the arms of Don José, he began to drive the nails through the soft, white hands of his victim. As the spikes entered the flesh the blood spurted forth, reddening the hands of the sculptor. Extreme suffering resuscitated the captain. He wept and cursed and prayed by turns. His features twisted with pain, his bones cracked. He supplicated the old man to pardon him, to cease his punishment; but Cucharez's ears were deaf to his pleadings, and the blows of the hammer followed each other slowly, heavily, driving the spikes home into the black wood.

When the sculptor rose after having nailed the feet, Don Jose was at the point of death. Then Esteban turned to leave the studio. As he closed the door upon Dolores and her lover he said pitilessly: "Good night, faithless one."

CHAPTER III.

The next Sunday the crucifix of the master Esteban Cucharez was solemnly blessed by the Burgos. In the shadow of the great pillars it was miraculous in its reality, with its shrivelled skin and clotted blood staining the decomposing flesh. But they looked in vain for the sculptor. He had disappeared from Burgos with his wife, after having placed, unaided, his greatest work in the cathedral. And one day, during the service, the half-decayed body of Don José Santabalzo fell from the cross in the midst of the kneeling worshippers.



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Half a Handkerchief.

IF there was one thing Mr. Horace Wingrave objected to more than another, it was a debating society; and of all the debating societies that came under the notice of this amiable gentleman, the Eagle Young Man's Debating Society was by far the most objectionable.

"What do the young idiots expect to gain by wasting their breath on the senseless twaddle discussed at their meetings?" he asked a friend one day; and, as a hard-headed business man, he saw no interest in the intellectual benefits derived from membership.

"Bless my soul," he continued, "when I was a young man such tomfoolery never existed, and instead of spending hour after hour in useless talking, all my spare time was devoted to work, sir, to work."

The reason why the old gentleman was so concerned about this society in particular was to be found in the fact that Wyndham Holgate, his confidential secretary, was both organiser and president of the E.Y.M.D.S., in which capacity a great deal of his time was occupied.

Holgate was twenty-five, smart, and good-looking; and his business abilities were fully appreciated by his employer.

Had the young man been anything but shrewd and capable as regards his secretarial duties, Mr. Wingrave would probably have dismissed him long before, so prejudiced was he against the debating society.

But he knew with whom he was dealing, and rather than give offence he showed his disapprobation of Holgate's conduct by delivering periodical lectures on the wasted energy which that young man threw into his unremunerative work.

And things became still more complicated when it was known that Wyndham had fallen in love with Emma, his employer's daughter, and that the young lady had not looked with disfavour on his suit.

When the alarming news came to the ears of the old man, he stamped and raved, declaring by all that was natural that the audacious Holgate should leave his employ the following morning.

But things did not come to such a pass as this, for a few minutes previous to his employer's arrival at the office, Wyndham succeeded in transacting a smart piece of business, by which he saved the firm some hundreds of pounds; and this tended to lessen the severity of the blow which fell upon his shoulders.

Mr. Wingrave contented himself therefore with forbidding Holgate his house. The meetings between the lovers had, in consequence, to be clandestine. They were none the less frequent for that. The old man never suspected his daughter capable of such a thing.

Emma Wingrave was quite willing to wait until her father's consent should be obtained; and this would not be very long, Wyndham assured her, for the father could not hold out for ever, and ruin his daughter's future happiness, simply because of the prejudice he maintained against the Eagle Debating Society.

Mr. Wingrave had been in the volunteers ever since he was a young man, and at this time he was Colonel of the West Dashton Rifles, of which regiment Wyndham Holgate and most of the young men in Mr. Wingrave's establishment were members.

Thanks to his natural energy and perseverance, Holgate had risen in due course to the position of adjutant, and, proud as the old gentleman was of his private secretary, he was still prouder of his Adjutant Holgate.

By this time the Eagle Debating Society had developed into a large concern, and on one memorable occasion the delighted members, wishing to show some appreciation of their president's efficiency, presented him with a handsome watch, and moved and carried a resolution to the effect that a fixed salary should be paid to him.

This, of course, linked Holgate still more firmly with the Eagles, and though I believe he would previously have given serious consideration to the idea of severing his connection with them altogether in order to obtain Mr. Wingrave's consent to his daughter's union, such a course was now out of the question.

It was not Mr. Wingrave's principle to say one thing and mean another. He was a man of his word, he declared; and those who had anything to do with him were all at one on that point.

But the redoubtable Wyndham did not in the least despair; in fact, the very contumacy that the old man exhibited in respect of his suit lent a spice of romance to the courtship, and made the stolen meetings all the more delightful.

"If you would only give up that abominable society, the girl is yours," exclaimed the old gentleman on the occasion of one of his lectures, after Holgate had fixed up another smart piece of business.

It was manifest that Mr. Wingrave would have given much in order to have taken Wyndham as his son-in-law without any qualms of conscience. But he had spoken once on the subject—rashly, perhaps—and now he would never go back on his word—no, never.

The Easter manœuvres were approaching, and preparations were made for the departure of the West Dashtons for the scene of action.

Under the command of Colonel Wingrave the regiment travelled down to engage the regulars in mortal combat.

The weather was extremely hot, and after the first day's toil of fighting, marching, reconnoitring, scouting, and assaulting, few men in the Dashton Rifles felt as blithe and gay as they had done on the day of arrival.

The nights were bitterly cold, and on the second day Colonel Wingrave, returning in the early hours of the morning from a mess dinner, caught a chill, magnified tenfold by the prospect of the march past before the General on the following morning.

Reaching his tent, the Colonel dispatched his orderly for the surgeon, while the unfortunate officer sneezed himself hoarse.

When his servant returned, the Colonel was already between the blankets, his nose carefully tallowed with the tent candle, and a huge scarf wrapped threefold round his head.

Naturally, it was very little the doctor could do. He

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simply dosed his patient with hot brandy and water, and ordered him to keep warm.

As in business, so in warfare; Horace Wingrave was a slave to duty. Although it was possible for him to absent himself from the inspection on the morrow on a plea of indisposition, such a course never entered his head; he would go if he had 10,000 colds. His anxiety was the sorry figure he would cut before the eyes of the regular as well as the volunteer troops—a drawn sword in one hand, and a pocket-handkerchief in the other.

When the morning broke a slight frost lay upon the ground, and the air was keen and cutting. The Colonel awoke with a violent sneeze that shook him to the core, and which was followed by a number of minor spasmodic efforts to allay the gentle titillation of his nostrils.

Hastily getting into his trousers and tunic, the Colonel buckled on his sword, and dived into the bottom of his camp trunk for half-a-dozen pocket-handkerchiefs which he had taken the precaution to procure.

Then he mounted his horse and galloped off to the parade ground. He was in excellent time, for the General had not yet arrived.

Reining up sharply, he proceeded to walk his horse along the front of the lines with all the dignity of a volunteer Colonel.

The bleak air of the morning irritated him, and before a hundred yards had been covered he prepared to blow his nose, when, dash it all! where was his pocket-handkerchief?

Neither up his sleeve nor in the breast of his tunic was the missing article to be found. As a last resource he removed his cap and searched the inside.

A gust of bitterly cold wind blew upon his unprotected head, and hastily replacing his helmet, Colonel Wingrave sat gazing vacantly in front of him, while tears filled his eyes in his endeavour to restrain the frightful nasal outburst which every minute threatened to break the stillness of the morning air.

Digging his spurs viciously into the horse's flanks, he cantered towards an officer standing a short distance off.

It proved to be a business acquaintance of his, and the courage of the unfortunate man rose in anticipation of the loan of a pocket-handkerchief.

"Mording, Mr. Parsons. Hab you such a thig as a pocket-hadkerchief about you? I've beed an' lef' mide at headquarters, ad I hab such a codfouded code."

"Sorry to hear that, Mr. Wingrave, but I'm still more sorry to say that I haven't a handkerchief to spare. Have a touch of influenza myself."

Colonel Wingrave gave a most despairing look at the speaker, then turned and rode disconsolately away, vowing that the next piece of business transacted with Parsons should be to the latter's disadvantage.

He could contain himself no longer now; the sneeze must have its way. But, zounds, his nose was troubling him.

The General was now approaching the parade-ground, and no eye in the whole Army could equal his for discerning the slightest defect in both officers and men. And every spot on the Colonel's uniform would show like ink on a sheet of white paper.

The General, too, was all the more keen on discovering blemishes, for the regiment was a volunteer one.

Colonel Wingrave was furious. The General was certain to observe the stains on his tunic, was certain to make due note of the observation, and would probably pass some remark concerning them to the Colonel himself. Then he would be disgraced. The thought was too horrible. He gave one despairing look round.

At the head of the Dashton Rifles Adjutant Holgate was walking his horse slowly up and down, awaiting the arrival of the Colonel.

Wingrave soon espied him. He hated to place himself under an obligation to the young fellow, and there was, of course, the chance that the Adjutant had but one pocket-handkerchief and a touch of influenza as well.

Cantering up, the Colonel said:

"Mording, Holgate. I caught a codfouded code last night, ad haben't a hadkerchief about me. Suppose you haben't a spare wud?"

The Colonel said this with little hope of success, but to his intense satisfaction the young man drew a large silk handkerchief down his sleeve, and handed it to the Colonel, retaining, however, the grip of one corner.

"I've only one, Colonel, but you are welcome to half."

Then he drew his sword, and sliced the silk from top to bottom, leaving by far the greater portion in the elder man's hand.

"How on earth can I thank you enough?" exclaimed the grateful officer, between the trumpet-like blasts which followed. The reply was quick:

"By forgetting that I am president of the Eagle Debating Society."

Colonel Wingrave beamed on him over the cluster of red silk which surrounded his nose. He was in such a perfectly happy state of mind that he would have granted almost anything at that moment.

He realised the results that would accrue when he gave his answer, but, for once in his life, the old gentleman went back on his word.

"I dare say," he said, "by a violent effort I shall be able to obliterate the fact that you are in any way connected with the Eagle Debating Society."

He finished up with a blast that almost drowned the last few words, then turned, and cantered away, just as the General and his staff came up.

The inspection passed off most successfully, and Colonel Wingrave was commended upon the appearance of his troops.

When the Dashton Rifles returned to town that night, Adjutant Holgate dined with the Colonel and his daughter. No mention was made of the handkerchief incident at dinner. The old gentleman related thrilling narratives of the dangers through which they had passed during the war.

Emma was greatly surprised at the sudden and unaccountable familiarity between the two men, and the mystery remained unsolved until after dinner, when she was alone with Wyndham.

"Your father has overcome his scruples about the society."

She looked at him. "Don't tease me," she replied pettishly.

"On my honour, Emma. I bought you," he added enigmatically.

"Bought me?" And her eyes opened in astonishment. "What did you pay for me?"

"The other half of this," he exclaimed laughing, pulling out the piece of silk.

There are occasions on which Wyndham Holgate takes every opportunity of teasing his wife, and he has found from experience, that the readiest means of producing the desired effect is to remind her that he bought her for half a pocket-handkerchief, which is all she is worth.

Ethel Dicey.

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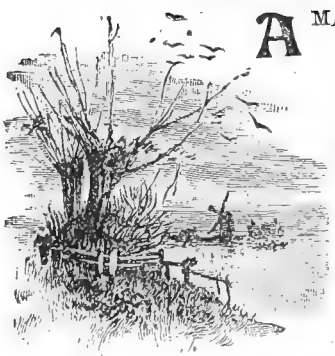
The Treasures of the White God

SUMMARY.

Robert Lane, escaped convict No. 407, is tracked to the World's Fair Grounds at Chicago. He is last seen, after an exciting chase by Mr. Inspector Grey and his assistant, Detective Dean, locked in a burning boat on the lake.

CHAPTER III.

Reward and Roses.



A MAN in a prison is a man in a tomb. A man in a prison, sent there unjustly, is a man buried alive with all the senses, ambitions, and emotions chained to torturing helplessness.

Convict No 407 was a "lifer." For five years he had ceased to have a name, carried from record to record as a machine, a number. Had the warder been asked his original name, research, not memory, could alone have supplied the information.

When he was first brought to the prison this man had interested even the officials. His fine face, manly bearing, the latent fire in his expressive eyes, bespoke the intelligence of a more than ordinary man. The impression soon wore off, however. No. 407 violated two stringent rules of the institution. He constantly demanded the means of communicating with the authorities to investigate his case; he as constantly asserted his innocence, and refused to perform menial labour. In other words he became listed in the class "troublesome."

The dark cell, the solitary, became his regular portion, until, physically wrecked, mentally subjugated, No. 407 gave up the unequal task of battling powerful tyrants, and succumbed, seemingly, to his fate.

One impulse, hidden, secretive, however, haunted every waking moment—the desire, the intense resolve, of escape.

One dark night a quick shot from one of the sentry towers on the outside walls of the prison rang out like a warning note.

Other guards rushing from their posts of duty, saw a wild form scale the massive masonry, drop to the outside world, and disappear in the darkness and gloom of the night, a target for twenty bullets, but running the fearful gauntlet unscathed.

From that moment No. 407 disappeared as effectually as if the earth had opened and swallowed him up. Search was made, rewards were offered, watch was set at every ocean port, and the ordinary avenues of departure from the United States were placarded with a description of the man who for four years had worked silently, patiently, to escape the meshes of the law, and had succeeded.

The details of that escape electrified the reading public, and set the prison officials agog. It must have taken the escaped convict fully a year to secure and prepare the tools with which he cut his way to liberty.

A common case knife had been nicked into the semblance of a file. After a year of incessant night toil, the prisoner had managed to cut out a foot section of one of the strong iron bars of his cell door. A like space of time was devoted to a second bar. These were set back in place, showing no mar or break whatever, by employing small pieces of black cloth as washers. Between the guards' rounds, hourly, No. 407 removed these bars, restored them to place, crept down the cell corridors to an old unused guard tower, forced the door, worked at the outer grated window, returned to his cell, awaited the coming of the guard, repeated the operation, and at the end of four years left his cell for the last time one dark night to make a final dash for the liberty he so craved.

This was the man upon whose trail that eventful June night Mr. Inspector Grey and his trusty assistant had set out. This was the man who, escaping incredible perils in a bold effort at evading arrest, had cut the old boat free, only to find himself penned in by a flame, adrift on an uncertain sea, abandoned finally by his pursuers, who acknowledged in the grim monster, Death, a rival whose clutch was sure and merciless.

No. 407 was dead! An item in the public prints announced it, the electric wire conveyed the intelligence to the prison authorities.

Mr. Inspector Grey gave vent to his disappointment over the loss of the reward and a noted prisoner by sullenly leaving the Exhibition Grounds and hastening to police headquarters to make a report of the exploit of the evening.

The watchman returned to his post of duty.

Only Detective Dean never lost his equilibrium. He doubted not the death of the convict, he doubted not that the holocaust of the lake ended a great chapter in criminal history, but it did not terminate all the issues of the case—*for him.*

No, Mr. Detective Dean was an indomitable man, and if in his quest for the convict, something besides mere interest in his fate as a police official swayed him, that actuating motive seemed to come to the surface now, as, abandoned by the gruff inspector and the glum watchman, he made his way alone and thoughtfully through the deserted World's Fair grounds.

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Dormitory D was his destination. He proceeded straight to the self-same room where the tragic incident of the evening had occurred. Only the noise of snoring broke the stillness.

The keen-eyed, ferret-faced man seemed to have come with a decided purpose in view. He proceeded straight down the dimly lighted avenue between the two rows of compartments, and halted directly in front of one with its broken door hanging from shattered hinges.

This was the room whence Robert Lane, escaped convict No. 407, had made his sudden dash for liberty less than two hours ago—the room into which the inspector had sprung, to find the bird flown and the nest empty.

He held in the light of the mask lantern a limp, ragged article.

Detective Dean whipped a dark lantern from his coat as he entered the compartment. It bore evidence of considerable disorder and precipitate flight. A bundle lay under the cot, and this the man of the law seized and inspected. Avidity changed to disappointment, however, as he found it to contain only a suit of working clothes, and although he ransacked every pocket, not even so much as a scrap of paper or a match came to light.

The man-hunter's brow was drawn in wrinkles of perturbation, his thin lips looked sour and irritated.

"Too bad!" he muttered half audibly. "I had hoped to find some hint, clue, document. Ah! what is this?"

Pawing, shaking, groping over the bedclothes, his hand had suddenly met some object that demanded a new attention. Interest and eager hope flamed back into his eyes, as he held in the light of the mask lantern a limp, ragged article, the name, use, and object of which would have puzzled almost any person.

It was time-worn, time-stained, and, too, it seemed, a time-honoured appendage of the habiliment of the late inmate of the couch. It had two strings running out, each about half a yard, sufficient to encompass a healthy man's waist or chest. Its centre was a pad of woollen folds of cloth, a receptacle for money, a——

"Chest protector, health plaster—I see!" ejaculated Mr. Detective Dean, with sparkling eyes.

He handled the uncouth mass gingerly. A dainty man in his personal habits, there was an innate repugnance to contact with a bundle of rags that had been worn through prison toil, sweat, and uncleanness, for probably five years.

"A clever fellow, this 407," continued the detective in low soliloquy, as meantime he held the cloth article aloft, and with the blade of his penknife began to pick at the matted, hardened threads that fastened it together.

"Here is a find—no fear of that! In the hurry of his escape, the convict dropped or forgot it. Through his first arrest in prison, and out of it, by pretending that it was a chest-protector, a strengthening plaster, he has managed to keep on wearing this cloth. Inside of it he has doubtless stowed away the document, the secret, the clue that Richard Sheldon would give ——"

Amid the eagerness, the tense, quivering excitement of the moment, the detective became mute. His eyes dilating, his deft fingers permeated with a slight unsteady tremor, he centred a fascinating attention upon the object at which he was cutting.

Rip—tear! the coarse outer covering was removed. Inside, clean, but creased and compact, lay a canvas packet.

Snip—flap! this in turn was ripped from place, and thrown heedlessly to the floor. The newly-revealed covering was of rubber. A mere incision severed that, so he could tear it apart easily.

Out rolled a minute folded piece of paper—no, parchment. Mr. Detective Dean gasped.

Ah! the sportsman's zest was nothing to this. The precious yellow fragment was in his clutch at last. He unfolded it.

Writing! He glared at it—jargon, undecipherable characters, bewildering conglomeration of topsy turvy lines and curves! What of it? Mr. Detective Dean knew his business. He drew a long breath of relief, of joy irrepressible, of mighty triumph, placed the bit of script inside his watch-case for safe keeping, extinguished his lantern, and smiled!

A far-away smile, a rapt, devoted smile, such a smile as the victor wears when the battle is over, the field won, the rich trophies of nations at his feet!

His step was brisk as he left the room, the building, the World's Fair grounds, in turn. His head was bared, he breasted the rising tempest serenely. Above the sob, the wail, the roar of the wind, ever and anon from his lips some powerful emotion wrung a wild, gloating cry, as if, after many years, the tide had turned, the pursuit of a lifetime had brought at last a golden glowing reward.

Mr. Inspector Grey, seated in his swivel-chair at his office, tugged, toiled, perspired over the formal colourless report of failure complete that must be sent to the chief of police ere morning's light had dawned.

Mr. Detective Dean, seated in his humble room at a third-rate boarding-house, chose its one easy chair, donned slippers and lounging gown with a sigh of luxurious relief, and snuggled down into a nest of happy thoughts.

He chuckled, he rubbed his hands gloatingly, he seemed inspired with but two predominating emotions—rare content, supreme self-satisfaction.

Finally he arose. It was to proceed to a neat antiquated desk in one corner of the room. Thence he took the materials for writing a letter; thence, too, he selected a newspaper. The latter he began to peruse. It was folded across the advertising page, and his eyes became riveted on a thumb-marked item, headed: "For Sale—Country Property."

"Five acres," it ran; "modern house of ten rooms, all appliances for health and comfort. Near to station, cheap fare to city, fine lawn and hedge. Four acres in roses of rare variety. A grand chance for a person having a knowledge of flowers to operate a lucrative rose-garden."

Mr. Detective Dean's face expanded as he read. He turned his head, too, with the admiring cynosure of a lover of the beautiful, to a fine lithograph of a bunch of roses hanging over the fireplace, and fully as affectionately to a faded Maréchal Niel drooping from a vase placed on a wall bracket.

"I can smell them now!" he sniffed. "Ah, the beauties! From chasing men to chasing butterflies; from making criminals hunted beasts of prey to raising the delicate, golden-hearted beauties of the garden! How I have waited, and the reward has come! Paradise at last! I'll take the place."

The place was advertised at £2,000. Mr. Detective Dean's open bank-book on the desk showed the paltry balance to his credit of £53 2s.

Yet in a bold, flowing hand he began a letter that announced to the owner of the suburban five-acres that he would take the same; all cash, taxes and assessments, fully paid, that day week.

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Snuggled down into a nest of happy thoughts.

Then, his sphinx-like face wearing the same grim smile it had worn since the discovery of the parchment scroll, Mr. Detective Dean wiped away the sweat of an honest man's brow, and going to bed, slept the sleep of the just.

CHAPTER IV.

For Sale—A Conscience.

The report that Mr. Inspector Grey made of the occurrence at the World's Fair grounds was carried personally by that gentleman to the office of the chief of the city police, and delivered into the hands of that official at the regular morning council of the heads of the force.

He accompanied it with profuse verbal explanations. He was nettled at failure, he dreaded ridicule and contempt, and the chief had a sharp tongue. Before the latter had begun his ordinary diatribe of fault-finding, the inspector had gracefully lifted the burden of censure from his own unwilling shoulders and had transferred it to the broader ones of his assistant, Detective Dean.

"I directed," he explained plausibly; "Dean was counted on to execute. The man slipped him. Twice he had him fairly in his grasp." And convinced and angry, the chief at once dispatched a summons for the culprit, in language not to be misunderstood.

"We cannot afford to dispense with the services of a bright man like Dean," he remarked, "but a dressing down will sharpen his wits."

The censure never came, however. Scarcely had the note been dispatched, when a sealed official envelope was handed to the chief.

It was signed by Detective Dean, and it announced, in formal phraseology, his final and irrevocable resignation from the local detective force.

A surprise to the chief, a "stunner" to the inspector, its perusal left the one cheated of his regular morning scold, the other with suspicious mental queries as to the motive of this strange and sudden freak of the well-known detective.

It was only move one in the programme laid out by the keen-witted officer early that morning—a programme blocked out with the method, precision, and care of an important military campaign.

The man who had abandoned the promises of high official preferment for a five-acre patch of roses, was at that very moment on his way to secure the reward of five years' patience, toil and perseverance.

He was dressed his nattiest, shaven cleanly, and calm and collected. Never was his eye brighter, his nerves more steady of poise, and yet he was starting out to play a game upon which he had staked everything. Upon mere conjecture, the turn of a die, the effect of a word, he had resigned his position, had practically purchased a £2,000 rose garden with less than £60 in available funds, in the power of possession, earning, or borrowing.

He did not pause in his brisk walk until he had reached that portion of the city where the best residences were grouped. There was one more pretentious than its neighbours, showy, modern, and surrounded by tasty gardens. Detective Dean ascended its marble steps jauntily. The outer massive door bore a name—"Richard Sheldon."

A servant admitted him, took his card, ushered him into a richly-furnished library, and departed to learn the pleasure of the owner of all this royal magnificence.

A heavy, rapid step sounded in the hall a minute later. A man of middle age entered the room, an eager expression in his eyes.

Those eyes were at their best just now, quite natural and human like, thrown off guard by some overpowering emotion, but bad eyes—false eyes in every respect—the lurking, sinister measure of hypocrisy and cunning in their dark depths plainly showed.

"Mr. Sheldon," murmured Dean, arising, precise and formal, as a master of deportment.

The nodding master of the house flung himself into an arm-chair, and fixed an anxious, penetrating glance on his visitor.

"Come!" he said sharply; "you have news."

"Of importance!"

"Concerning the escaped convict?"

"Yes."

"Don't keep me on nettles!"

"Very good. We traced him — Robert Lane, 407; cornered him."

"Where?"

"At the World's Fair grounds."

Sheldon started violently, seemed on the point of saying something, and then, tapping his fingers on the arm of his chair, remarked simply:

"Go on."

"We cornered him; he slipped us; got locked into the hold of an old barge; the craft took fire. He is dead."

"Dead!"

He was dressed his nattiest.

Richard Sheldon turned white to the lips. His great claw-like fingers were passed over his swarthy sinister face in an aimless, uncertain way.

"Yes, fire and water have left not a trace."

"And the man—you remember what I told you—you recall the importance of gaining information——"

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The man's tones were feverishly eager. His quivering soul hung on the reply of his visitor.

"Hold on," spoke the latter, his manner changing suddenly, something mandatory, imperious, coming into tone and face. "Let us go back."

"To what?" demanded his host vaguely.

"To the beginning, to a starting point, to a proper mutual, perfect understanding of the vital issues of the case in hand. For five years you have employed me on secret missions, off and on. Recently entire personal efforts have been devoted to tracing down this man—this Englishman—Adrian Burgoyne."

Again Richard Sheldon paled and started and glared nervously about him.

"Don't speak that name here aloud!" he said.

"Why not? It is his right name," responded Dean almost aggressively.

"I know, I know; but as 407, as Robert Lane, he has lived and died. No need reviving dead issues. I engaged you to try and secure from the convict a secret I feared he possessed. That failing, I demanded his incarceration, his safe keeping."

"Why?"

Clear as a clarion note rang forth the abrupt query.

Richard Sheldon frowned darkly.

"That," he remarked chillingly, "is my secret."

"And mine, also."

"Eh?"

Blankly staring at the face of the man he had hitherto employed and treated as a servant, Sheldon read there something of the latent menace of a master.

"I know all," pursued the detective glibly. "Knowing all, I am prepared to profit by it. I have resigned my position as a detective. I have purchased a rose-garden. Roses are my hobby. All I need is the means to secure the purchase."

Mr. Richard Sheldon quailed before the clear, unwavering magnetism of his visitor's resolute eye.

"How—how much?" he stammered.

"A mere trifle to you, a bagatelle, a matter of two thousand pounds. Wait, sir. I had better talk. I never blackmail a client. I never compound a felony. Had I found 407 alive I might have gone to him instead of you. He, being dead, leaving me in possession of valuable information, I offer it to the highest cash bidder. I assume you to be an anxious purchaser."

From beneath his bristling, bushy eyebrows, Sheldon viewed his visitor. The mask was down now. The detective's motives and intentions were laid bare.

"In following out this case," proceeded Dean, in the same even, imperturbable tones, "I stumbled over several strange and suspicious discoveries. Shall I detail them?"

"Your surmises?"

"I have none," interrupted Dean promptly. "I never surmise. I deal only in facts. I first learnt that this young Englishman, Adrian——"

"407, you mean."

Dean shrugged his shoulders.

"As you like," he assented lightly—"came to this city some five years ago, with an introduction and a message for you. A month later he was decoyed to a meeting of some anarchists."

"Decoyed?" insinuated Sheldon with emphasis.

"I am satisfied of it; I am certain a plot was laid—the result, the murder of a striking iron-moulder; one arrest under a false name—No. 407. He was convicted, his case rushed through. A man named Colonel Lytle was active in the prosecution. I have since learned that he is your right-hand man. All this was done with a motive. No, Mr. Richard Sheldon," went on Dean, waving his hand imperiously, "don't interrupt me, don't dispute me, don't try the highly-indignant dodge. I deal in facts. If you are not willing to heed their import, I shall take them to the superintendent of police."

"You can prove nothing," hissed his pale and quivering host through his set teeth.

"Investigation might," returned Dean confidently. "Having left the force, I have no desire to delve into the past history of a dead convict, nor the motives that led you to persecute him, hound him down, drive him to his death."

Sheldon started violently.

"Hard words these," growled the man at the desk.

"True ones. Seeking a reason for your interest in No. 407, I found it. His life was nothing to you, his death comparatively a matter of indifference; but his silence—that you secured. You sealed his lips, you disarmed him from molesting you, but he defeated your plans in one particular. There was information you desired to secure from him. Did you obtain it? No. There was a clue, a mystery, a secret, a document, that you craved."

"And his secret died with him," muttered Sheldon.

"Perhaps not," the detective coolly replied.

"What!"

The detective waved his host back, as, under a hopeful strain of the intensest excitement, the latter arose to his feet.

"I can be terse, plain," he spoke briefly. "I have found a document that the convict has evidently carried about him, treasured, guarded for years."

"Give it me!"

Trembling all over, Richard Sheldon extended a mandatory hand.

"Wait," interrupted Dean. "My terms are plain. Just glance over that."

He tossed upon the desk the self-same rose-garden advertisement over which he had gloated in his room early that morning. He had cut it out and pasted it on a blank sheet of paper.

With scowling brows Sheldon perused it. His lips knitted, his fingers twitched, some mighty battle raged within him. Finally he looked up.

"Two thousand pounds is a big sum," he grunted out.

"It depends," placidly supplemented Dean.

"I am to understand that the amount liquidates all claim for past professional services on your part?"

The detective nodded affirmatively.

"It secures, furthermore, your perpetual silence regarding what you may now know, or later learn?"

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"Yes."

"And upon its payment, you transfer to me the secret—"

"Document, call it," interrupted Dean.

"Document, then. You surrender that to me. Have you read it?"

"Not I."

"I agree to your terms."

Richard Sheldon wheeled in his pivot chair so as to force the desk before him.

From a compartment he drew a cheque book, tore out a blank, and began:

"Two thousand—wait! Your full initials?"

"Berwyn L."

"Berwyn L."

"Berwyn L. Dean—two thousand pounds. Now then, the document."

Mr. Detective Dean inspected and folded the cheque. There was placid satisfaction in his heart, a glowing smile on his face, a marked contrast to the eager, selfish look that traversed that of Sheldon.

"Come!" iterated the latter almost fiercely, "don't keep me on tenter-hooks. The document!"

Dean sprung back the case of his watch. From its safe receptacle he drew the tiny, folded bit of parchment that he had secured after so much trouble, in Dormitory D. at the World's Fair grounds.

"I found this accidentally," he explained. "Valuable or not, it was evidently treasured by Convict 407. It was all he left behind him."

He handed it to Sheldon. The latter tore it from his grasp like a starving wolf ravenous for food within its sight. For the moment the man's true character flashed to the surface completely, and he was transformed.

Watching that fierce, wicked face, the detective sighed.

"A big mystery under all this," he murmured. "I wonder if elucidating it would not, after all, have gratified my professional pride more than raising roses will the rural instincts of my nature?"

Twice he spoke to Sheldon, but the latter never heeded

Dean sprung back the case of his watch.

him. Apparently impervious to all extraneous surroundings, the man had torn open the bit of yellow parchment, and, smoothing it out before him, sat staring at it, devouring it with rapt though puzzled gaze.

The detective left the room. His work was done, the reward of honest labour reposed in his inside breast pocket—the garden of roses was his!

The transaction was completed. Mr. Detective Dean had gone through ten years of service as a police officer, and his reputation had never suffered a particle.

But Mr. Detective Dean had his price, and had been paid it. Between the trouble of clearing the character of an

Sat staring at it.

obscure convict from the stain of guilt, and fleecing an unscrupulous rogue out of a small share of his large ill-gotten gains, the detective bartered his soul, and chose the latter course.

After all—he put this final quietus on the upbraidings of conscience—Convict 407 might not be innocent; after all, what was a human life among the many sunk in darkness?

But let us see how differently, in the end, was Convict 407 judged by Mr. Detective Dean, twelve intelligent jurymen, and by the angels of God in Heaven.

(To be continued.)

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ALCOHOLISM AND OBESITY.

It is often rashly asserted that drunkenness is uncommon on the European Continent, and that, in particular, it is a rare vice in France. Certain medical therapeutists and specialistic scientists have, however, recently furnished some suggestive statistics which flatly contradict the cherished beliefs of those who have persistently proclaimed the sobriety of the French people. Dr. Lancereaux, at the French Academy of Medicine, having made a special study of the subject, declares that in his extensive hospital practice out of twenty patients ten are, on an average, suffering from some form of alcoholic poisoning—women being responsible for a large proportion of the enormous consumption of alcohol thus indicated. The learned doctor sums up the results on the population at large as representing a mortality greater than that caused by the greatest epidemics, the ruin of labour, and—what is already startlingly evident in France—the steady diminution of the very population of the country. Other authorities, again, assert that with the annual increase in the consumption of spirits, to the extent of nearly 500,000 gallons in various liquors, there has been a corresponding increase of corpulence. This appears to make alcohol responsible for the troublesome and sometimes dangerous increase of unhealthy adispose tissue on the strength of the somewhat slipshod theory of the affinity of alcohol for oxygen in the system. It is certainly worthy of note that some of the most eminent authorities on the Continent and in America absolutely debar the corpulent from drinking alcohol in any shape or form, while on the other hand one of the most prominent and successful specialists in England boldly and flatly contradicts, on this point, his professional brethren. He permits those undergoing his treatment to drink the spirits of their choice—although he does not advocate the use of these beverages. The result of his experiments is that he can reduce a person's weight from 3lb. to 6lb. in a week, although the patient may drink alcohol even to excess; nor will any extra decrease in weight be experienced by a restriction of the amount of drink consumed. His aim is to attack corpulence at its very root, and to achieve this he does not approve of such a drastic measure as the sudden and indiscriminate stoppage of a person's accustomed spirituous drink; for there are many who have so habitually used themselves to their "dram" that its prohibition is unquestionably a great hardship, if not actually dangerous. Again, he takes exception to the action of the majority of specialists in dealing with obesity, in prescribing a limited diet. To this he takes exception on the very reasonable ground (to quote from his clever 256-paged book, entitled "Corpulency, and the Cure," by F. C. Russell, Woburn House, Store Street, Bedford Square, London, W.C.), that with the reduction of fat by his process, the most unhealthy portion of this excess tissue, such as those which clog the vital organs, begin to waste first, and, as a consequence, the entire system becomes healthier within the first twenty-four hours of the treatment. Then immediately the patient begins to be exhilarated by such symptoms as the freedom of breathing, the stronger and steadier action of the heart, the feeling of lightness, the absence of the sense of oppression—each organ performing its duty with increased regularity. He finds himself aroused suddenly from a lethargic heaviness and morbid drowsiness which have probably lasted for years; he feels, as it were, born anew, and instantly becomes more active and buoyant, both in body and mind—all of which pleasurable sensations are naturally accompanied by an increase of appetite. It is not necessary to be a scientist or a medical expert to adopt the common sense view of these matters. "Would you, then," argues Mr. Russell, "in the case of a person who for years, perhaps, has never known what a healthy appetite means, deprive him of food when Nature appealingly holds forth her hands, literally begging for it? No! those who reduce fat by starvation pay for their folly at usurers' interest when meeting the bills drawn against them on the Bank of Longevity. Let other specialists prescribe this; I will not countenance it," says Mr. Russell. Notwithstanding the increased amount of food taken daily, the weight, under the operation of his system, is steadily reduced, to which unerring testimony is given by the weighing-machine. The painstaking research and the marvellous success of the author of the above-named work justify us in arriving at the conclusion that his system may be followed with absolute confidence. His success is all the more remarkable because the whole secret consists in the use of a few herbal roots and a simple vegetable acid. We believe it is the only system of reducing obesity—and it is a very pleasant system—which is certain in its results and brings no after-penalties. We commend his book to our readers. It may be obtained post free by sending six penny stamps to Mr. Russell at the address already given.—*Brighton Examiner*, August 9th, 1895.

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Size.	Reduced Sale Price. Each.
6ft. by 9ft.	5/6
7½ft. by 9ft.	7/6
9ft. by 9ft.	8/6
9ft. by 10½ft.	9/6
9ft. by 12ft.	11/6
10½ft. by 12ft.	13/6
12ft. by 12ft.	15/6
12ft. by 13½ft.	17/6
12ft. by 15ft.	19/6
12ft. by 18ft.	24/0

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